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"A BOY, BY HONEY!" EJACULATED THE LANK MAN HALF CONTEMPTUOUSLY.

The Boy Gold Hunter ;

OR,

NAVAJO NICK'S SCOUT.

A TALE OF ARIZONA.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "NICK O' THE NIGHT," "HIDDEN
LODGE," "NIGHTINGALE NAT," ETC.

CHAPTER I. SOMEBODY'S SPY.

"I'm comfortable here if I am alone. Their prophecies thus far have proved useless words, and if Black Mahomet keeps up his good gallop a few days longer, I'll ride safely into Mohave City none the worse for my long tramp. My own mother wouldn't recognize me coated with alkali dust as I am, but then, she isn't likely to visit me in the wilds of Arizona. Well, I should think not."

The speaker, a youth, smiled at his last remarks, and fell to surveying his travel-stained person revealed by the camp-fire which he had kindled in the basin of what once had been a tributary of the Colorado.

Above him towered the banks of the nameless canyon; they seemed to stretch to the stars, hard stone walls unrelieved by a single cliff plant.

The cold night winds blew down the gorge and flared the flames of his fire.

He was a stout, handsome youth of sixteen or seventeen, and his jaunty buckskin garments which had been made by experienced hands fitted his faultless figure to a nicety. A rifle lay on the ground at his side, and ready for instant use in his belt were two heavy revolvers.

Black Mahomet, a lithe-limbed charger, with coal-black skin and a fiery eye, was also revealed by the fire. The horse was the boy's only companion, and that the two were close friends, the whinny given by the animal when his name was spoken attested.

But, what was the boy doing alone in the Indian country of Northern Arizona?

We have already heard him say that in a few days he expected to reach Mohave City, which was far west of his solitary fire. The Navajo country was behind him, but ahead, between him and his goal, was a veritable land of death, the abode of the savage and the grizzly.

A heart that shrunk from danger had no business where the young traveler was. Only the fearless could build a fire on the bed of the lost river, and laugh while contemplating his alkali-coated garments.

The boy's laugh was full of hope, good nature, and buoyant spirits, and while it yet sounded on the pleasant air of night, the horse thrust his head over his master's shoulder and looked askance into his face.

"Two better friends never traveled together than you and I, Mahomet!" said the boy, noticing this display of affection on the part of his steed; "one of these days, if my lead pans out as it ought to, I'll be rich enough to feed you

gilded oats, and build you a palace for your abode. But all leads don't pan out rich in Arizona. I've been a witness to the truth of that statement, and so have you, old chap. Nine out of ten prove to be chimneys. We'll hope, however, that ours may prove a bonanza, and it will, I'm thinking, if I'm following the right skein."

The boy paused rather suddenly, for the horse had raised his head, with his long sharp ears on the alert like a fox's.

"What is it, Mahomet? A prowling grizzly or a thieving coyote?" asked the youth, picking up the rifle and stepping back into the shadow of a boulder on which he had deposited the small amount of baggage he was carrying on his journey.

A moment later he became convinced that it was neither, for a rough voice assailed his listening ears:

"Hello thar, stranger? Ef ye'r' standin' in the sbadders whar I can't see ye, you've got the advantage ov one ov the lost arts. I'm perfectly harmless, ez docile ez a kitten, an' it stands a feller in hand to be kinder indulgent to his species in this part ov creation."

There was certainly nothing in this quaint and comical language that proclaimed the presence of an enemy, and the boy stepped partly into the fire-light. But he kept his finger at the trigger of his rifle.

"Come forward until I can see you," he said to the unseen. "You may be the harmless individual you call yourself, but I'm not taking any chances."

"Thet's right; you ought to hev a leather medal fer yer prudence," responded the voice a little nearer than before. "So hyar I come, not exactly a conquerin' hero, nor a seraph ov light; but one ov the lost arts."

The young traveler, still further emboldened by the last words, approached nearer to his fire, and fixed his eyes on the queer character submitted to his inspection. This person was tall, raw-boned, swarthy and uncouth. His sleeves seemed a mile too short and the wrists that their shortness revealed were the color of a mummy's skin. His torn pantaloons were thrust into a pair of well-worn cowhide boots, several tufts of reddish hair protruded from rents in a dilapidated hat, and his face was covered with a few days' growth of sandy beard. But above his cheeks a pair of eyes glittered like the orbs of a basilisk; they were restless, penetrating and cunning.

The stranger was no fool, at any rate. So thought the boy.

His only weapon was a long-barreled rifle which rested in the hollow of his left arm as he came forward. The boy seeing this removed his finger from the trigger of his weapon and the two stood face to face in the light of the fire.

"A boy, by hokey!" ejaculated the lank man, half contemptuously, and he stepped back to survey his new acquaintance.

"I did expect to see a man, 'pon my soul I did!"

"So did I!" retorted the boy, a merry flash in his bright eyes. "What do you call yourself?"

"Me? I'm one ov the lost arts. Thar's no sage

brush about me! I'm the Boss Cactus ov Arizona. When I say that I'm one ov the lost arts, I mean that the soil that produced me hezn't grown a thing since I left it. Look at me, boy. I'm handsome enough to be Cupid, an' travel-stained enough to be one ov the lost tribes ov Izra'l; but I'd ruther be the Boss Cactus than the hull compoodle I've mentioned."

The figure before the boy seemed to increase in stature as the speaker finished, and the young traveler gazed at him in silence for a minute.

"Whar ar' you steerin' fur?" the Cactus asked, suddenly.

The boy hesitated; the glittering eyes noticed it.

"Ef you don't want to tell, all right!" their owner said.

"I'm going to Mohave City!" the boy said, deciding at that moment.

Did the little eyes sparkle with more intensity?

"Mohave, eh? War goin' thar myself," ejaculated the Cactus. "No 'bjections to company, I hope?"

"Are you alone?"

For the first time the new-comer smiled.

"Ruther!" he answered, laconically, and then added: "The Boss Cactus ginerally travels in his own company. In fact, he thinks it the best he kin find in Arizona. Goin' to Mohave on business?"

"Perhaps."

"I am."

The boy gave the Cactus an inquisitive glance. He seemed to think: what kind of *business* could induce that queer specimen of humanity to seek a community supposed to be civilized?

Without invitation the Cactus had seated himself on the stone which the youthful adventurer had rolled to the fire for a seat, and the boy, with a grimace at this independence, accepted a place on the ground.

By degrees the twain thus strangely met became better acquainted. The stories which the Cactus spun about the wild country in which they were gradually drew the boy out, and he said that he was a late resident of a Navajo camp, where he was known as Navajo Nick. This information seemed to settle a few doubts that had lingered in the new-comer's mind, and from that moment his tongue became less noisy.

Navajo Nick gradually formed a favorable impression of his guest, despite the latter's uncouthness, and the provisions which he was about to attack when he appeared, he no longer hesitated to share with him.

But before the Cactus accepted the invitation to supper, he started up, and glancing at the boy, exclaimed:

"War it the leap ov a coyote, boy?"

Nick confessed that he had heard nothing.

"Mebbe I didn't either," responded the man.

"But, stay hyar till I investigate," and before the boy could remonstrate he darted down the canyon.

"I didn't hear a sound," mused our traveler. "Neither did Black Mahomet, and his ears are as sharp as that man's. A coyote always rouses my horse; he hears everything. Now look at him,"

Navajo Nick spoke as if he addressed a second person when in reality he was talking to himself. The horse had not heard the sound which had disturbed the Boss Cactus; he stood with drooping head just beyond the line of light, and apparently asleep.

After a minute's reflection the boy followed the Cactus. He seemed very inquisitive if not suspicious, for he carried a cocked revolver in his hand as he crept along the canyon's wall.

He soon got beyond the light of his camp-fire, and the only light now afforded was that which came down from the stars overhead.

It was not sufficient to enable him to distinguish objects at a great distance; but it showed him the figure of his strange guest about thirty feet away.

The man had not seen him, for he was taking something that made a strange noise from his bosom.

Navajo Nick held his breath.

A moment later the Cactus held a pigeon in his hand, and the boy saw that he was fastening something that glittered like polished tin around the bird's neck.

"I have enemies!" muttered Navajo Nick. "He is sending a message to them; the pigeon will tell them that he has found me. Ah! you old rascal! I must outwit you!"

At that moment the bird left the man's hand, and after fluttering a few seconds above his head shot upward and seemed to disappear among the stars.

The boy's eyes flashed while he saw the Cactus watching the flight of his messenger.

"I ought to end *your* part of the game here," fell from his lips. "But no! I will watch you till I find out who my enemies are and then—then— Ah! I guess Navajo Nick is able to take care of himself!"

The boy glided back to the fire as noiselessly as he had come to the spot, and had composed himself, when the Cactus returned.

"Well?"

"It war a prowlin' coyote jest ez I expected. My ears never fail me. I kin hear a snake crawl."

Nick's eyes glittered with triumph. "Your ears deceived you to-night, traitor. You did not hear *me*."

The Cactus resumed his seat at the fire while his eyes twinkled with satisfaction. Navajo Nick secretly watched him until he stretched his ungainly figure on the ground and fell asleep.

The boy pretended to follow his example, but he gradually rolled from the fire and reached his horse.

"Mohave City first!" he muttered. "I must take no chances now with the man who sends carrier pigeons to my enemies. Once in Mohave, I can defy them all."

He noiselessly muffled Black Mahomet's feet and saddled him. The Cactus still lay at the fire.

"Good-by, plotter!" the boy threw over his shoulder at the sleeper as he put his hand on the saddle to mount.

The next moment he was startled by a rough voice.

"Goin' away, eh?"

He looked toward the fire, and saw the Cactus wide awake, with his little eyes fixed on him!

"Yes, I'm going away. Stay back or die!" exclaimed the boy, vaulting into the saddle.

The Boss Cactus merely laughed.

CHAPTER II.

FOLLOWED BY A HORSE.

NEAR the close of a certain day exactly one week after the events just described a coal-black horse galloped into Mohave City.

Several Indian arrows were sticking in the animal's flesh, and the rider that reeled in his saddle had one of the shafts in his shoulder.

The horse was stopped by a crowd of bronzed men congregated on one of the streets of the Arizonian town, and strong arms lifted the Indian-chased youth from the saddle.

He was placed tenderly on the ground under the boughs of an oak near by, and fifty rough-looking fellows gathered about him.

Exhaustion and pain had produced a swoon, and the boy lay like one dead before the men of Mohave.

But the hands of a stalwart person called "Doc," by some, brought the young adventurer through his syncope safely, and several exclamations of satisfaction greeted the return to consciousness.

For several minutes the youth gazed searchingly into the faces above him, as if he were seeking a particular one, and then a sigh of disappointment escaped him.

"Lookin' fur anybody in partic'lar?" asked several.

"Yes—for Dagobert."

"Dagobert?" echoed ten men at once, but in different tones. "Thar's no sich man in Mohave."

The youth—Navajo Nick—sighed again and closed his eyes.

"Dagobert—not—here?" he murmured, slowly. "He said he would be. Ah! without him I fear I will not be able to strike it rich."

The bystanders heard none of this. The arrow had been drawn from the boy's shoulder, and one-half of the crowd were inspecting it.

"A Navajo shaft, by hokey!" exclaimed several, and their eyes wandered to the boy.

"Chased you, eh?"

"Yes."

"Nigh to Mohave?"

"I don't know when they gave up the chase; but I do know that if it hadn't been for Black Mahomet, I'd not be here alive."

"How many red-skins war thar?"

"About thirty. I emptied my revolvers among them. I know that."

"War they so nigh as thet?"

"The first intimation I had of their presence was a lasso that fell over my head, and tightened around my shoulders. It was near the mouth of Red Canyon. Black Mahomet saved me then. He sprung forward just as the lasso tightened and actually jerked it from the Indian's hands. Fortunately I was well seated at that time, and had a firm grip on the rein. I turned in my saddle then and gave the sneaking whelps all the ready ammunition that I

possessed. They retreated, and seizing the opportunity, I struck out for Mohave. Then I got my arrow."

"An' yer hoss, too!"

"Is Mahomet dead?" asked the boy, starting.

"No."

"Good! Black Mahomet is the biggest bonanza in horseflesh a man ever owned."

"Whar did you leave yer lasso—the one the reddies gave you?"

"I tore it loose and cast it aside at the outset of the chase. I don't like that kind of necktie."

"It's all the rage 'twixt hyar an' the Navajo kentry," said a man, and this coarse wit produced a boisterous laugh from the crowd.

"I can't tell you anything more about my tussle with the Navajoes," said Nick, trying to rise, but falling back with a groan. "I didn't think I was so weak," he added, smiling; "but a little rest will fix me up. So you don't know Dagobert?"

"Never heard ov 'im."

"That's bad. I am without a friend here."

"You kin soon make 'em."

"But not the kind I want—not like Dagobert."

That name seemed to mystify the men of Mohave, and while they were discussing it in low voices, a veritable giant, whose face was covered with a heavy black beard, made his way to where the boy reclined.

"The young 'un needs a softer bed than the ground," he said, stooping and putting his great arms around the wounded boy. "I've fixed up a sort of a place in my shanty fur 'im, an' I'll jest tote 'im over an' see how he likes it."

The man's action seemed to win the crowd.

"Three cheers fer Captain Flash!" yelled a voice, and three lusty cheers rent the air.

Navajo's cheek touched the leonine beard of the man while he was being carried to the place prepared for his reception, and he murmured a thousand thanks as he was placed on a couch whose bedding consisted of several blankets.

A strange light burned in the man's eyes when he shut the door of his cabin and turned to the boy. The room was quite gloomy, but through a little window just above the cot the last beams of day struggled, revealed, but dimly, his preserver and his surroundings.

Captain Flash took a seat beside the boy.

"You forgot my last instructions," he said, a reprimand in his tone.

Nick started and stared into the hairy face.

"Your instructions?" he echoed. "I don't understand you."

"You asked for Dagobert."

"Yes."

"You were to inquire for one who bore an entirely different name when you came. You nearly gave me away!"

The boy could hardly repress a cry.

"Then—"

"I am Dagobert!"

Navajo Nick sprung up and put out his hand.

"A thousand thanks. You are Dagobert my friend and partner."

"Here I am Captain Flash. Dagobert died when I came here, and Flash war born."

"I understand," said the boy. "I will remember."

"I trust so."

"Knowing you so long as Dagobert, it was but natural that that name should be the first to flash through my brain after my swoon."

Captain Flash nodded impatiently.

"You war not to seek me until you had discovered the secret," he said while his eyes sparkled with devouring eagerness.

"I have kept my part of the bargain," answered the boy.

"Then the secret is yours?"

"It belongs to us."

Captain Flash drew a long breath of supreme satisfaction.

"Death laid his hands on Alapatha's heart-strings, at last?" he exclaimed.

"He is to-day the deadest Indian in Arizona," smiled the boy.

"Tell me."

"It is a short story. Ten words will enlighten you. Alapatha met a bear that conquered him. I came up in time to slay the animal, but too late to save the chief. He told me the secret before he died. I know where the mountain of gold is. I didn't lose a word of the chief's instructions. I can repeat every one now. He always said that I should have the secret; but if I had not come up in the nick of time he would have carried it with him. He gave me this map, too."

"A close shave, by my eyes!" ejaculated Flash. "And you left at once?"

"That night!"

"An' you war follered?"

"Not by the Indians at first," said Nick, studying his companion's anxious face, and then he went on and related the visit of the Boss Cactus to the lone camp in Nameless Canyon.

Captain Flash listened with interest to the close of the narrative.

"What do you think of it?" asked Nick, breaking the strange silence which had followed his story.

The man started from his reverie.

"When can you start?" he said, not paying the slightest attention to the boy's interrogative sentence.

"At any time," he answered.

"With that shoulder?"

"Yes. It doesn't hurt now."

Captain Flash sprung up, satisfied. He went to the little window and looked out. Navajo Nick raised himself and watched the man who seemed to be studying the stars. All pain had left him; he felt strong again, for had he not found Dagobert, his friend, his partner?

Captain Flash turned suddenly from the window.

"Wait five minutes fer me hyar," he said, striding to the door, and the next moment Nick was alone.

"So Dagobert has become Captan Flash! I must not forget that," he murmured. "We will attend to Alapatha's secret; the mountain of gold belongs to Dagobert and me. But I did not tell him that it is in the midst of the Indian country. Pshaw! what if I had? He would have laughed. We are going away from Mohave to-night. I am sure we are!"

The boy, while he spoke thus, noticed a brilliant star that peeped in at the window. All at once it disappeared. He knew that no cloud had covered it, for the rainy season had not set in.

As he looked he seemed to make out the outlines of a face at the window; he rose and slipped forward.

His eyes had not deceived him; a face was at the window; but before he had gazed at it a moment, the captain reappeared.

"Now fer the bonanza. The hosses ar' ready," he said.

At that instant the head at the window dropped out of sight.

Ten minutes later Captain Flash and Nick drew rein in a narrow gulch, half a mile north of Mohave.

"Whar shall we strike fer?" whispered the captain.

"For the mou'h of Navajo Canyon."

"A good hundred mile from hyar!"

"At least that," the boy responded.

"Ar' the mountain nigh it?"

"No; but our nearest way is by the canyon."

"Wal, hyar goes into the Injun death-lands, with the biggest secret ov the century!"

They galloped through the gulch, and once more rode under the brilliant stars.

Suddenly Captain Flash drew rein and whipped out one of his brass-butted revolvers.

"We've got to begin killin' at the start," he said grimly, as he glanced at the boy gold-hunter.

"What do you mean?"

"We're follered!"

Nick thought of the face at the window. Might it not have been the homely phiz of the Boss Cactus?

Telling Nick to remain where he had drawn rein, the captain rode back. The boy cocked his revolvers and listened for his companion.

All at once Dagobert reappeared at his side.

"Well?" began Nick.

"We war follered by a horse thet hed no rider," was the response. "I frightened him back."

A horse without a rider? Nick appeared mystified; the answer did not place him entirely at his ease.

They went on again until Dagobert drew rein with a resounding oath.

"That horse again!" ejaculated Nick.

"Pshaw! what's the use ov foolin' with 'im. We'll lose 'im at daylight. Why didn't I think of that afore?" and Dagobert's spurs made his horse bound forward.

The hoof-beats behind them continued as they galloped on. The captain did not seem to hear them, but not one escaped the young gold-seeker's ears.

He could not think that a riderless horse would follow them so persistently.

His surmises were correct.

The horse behind them had a master!

CHAPTER III.

TWELVE OF A KIND.

"WHERE are we now, captain?"

"What! don't you know?"

"Not exactly, but near Navajo Canyon, I hope."

"We're not a thousand miles from it, that's sart'in. We are in the Black Forest, between Aztec Pass and Mount Bill Williams."

"Then we can't be far from our first halting place."

"Nigher than you think, boy."

Dagobert had spoken truly when he informed Navajo Nick that they had reached the Black Forest Mountains, one hundred miles from Mohave. They had crossed the Aquarius Range, swum the Bill Williams Fork of the Colorado, galloped through the lonely Aztec Pass, and were now among the densely wooded hills that constitute the famous Black Forest.

This journey had taken up several days and nights, and Nick longed for the time when he could throw himself from the wearying saddle, and, as he expressed it, "try it on foot."

Captain Flash, the Man with two Names, was not tired, but only eager. A strange impatience seemed to devour him. A thousand times during the trip he had covertly caught Nick regarding him out of the corners of his eyes as if he half suspected his display of fidelity.

But the boy surely could not suspect the man who was sharing the golden secret imparted by the dying chief.

"I am wrong in suspecting Dagobert," he would say to himself. "I must trust him until he has been tried. Besides, have I not placed myself in his power? And then I saw him tried four years ago."

During the three nights which had passed since their departure from Mohave, Nick had more than once imagined that he heard the hoof-beats of the strange horse; but as Dagobert did not seem to hear the noise he said nothing to him.

Could it be that an enemy—a spy—was still following them?

All at once, on the night when the conversation that opens the present chapter occurred, Dagobert turned to the boy.

The eyes of the giant had a strange flash in them.

"Comin' still, Navajo!" he said.

"Certainly. He's followed us from Mohave. I've heard him every night."

"You hev? Then why didn't you post me?"

"Because I thought you heard the same sounds."

"I war thinkin', plannin'. I heard nuthin'."

When Dagobert paused the two listened, but the unknown trailer had stopped.

"When we stop he stops also," whispered Nick. "Captain, I should have told you something before this. I have kept it back from fear of being laughed at. That horse has a rider."

Captain Flash did not start. He seemed to say with his eyes, "I'm of that opinion, too."

"That rider is my enemy's spy—the Boss Cactus."

That unsealed Dagobert's lips.

"How do you know?" he said.

"I saw him at your window before we left Mohave."

The Man with Two Names slid from his horse, drawing his revolver as he did so.

"Take my hoss an' go on straight ahead," he said to Nick. "I've got some private business with the Boss Cactus."

Navajo Nick moved forward, leading Dagobert's horse, and his ears were set to hear the hoof-beats behind him, and not for noises in front.

Suddenly a wild peal of laughter struck his ears. He drew rein as if the laughter had given vent to his humor directly under his horse's hoofs. But he had not. The sound came from a little valley into which the boy was about to descend.

He looked anxiously over his shoulder as if he could pierce the uncertain moonlight and call Dagobert back. He hoped that his friend had heard that laugh.

"Who laughed? you, Navajo?" suddenly said a voice at his side, and Nick was looking down into the giant's hairy face. "It came up from below, didn't it? Wal, we'll go down and let our trailer go fur the present."

The descent of the mountain, although difficult, was soon accomplished, and when once in the nameless valley below, Captain Flash uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Hyar's the last place whar I expected to find a tavern!" he said.

"A tavern?" echoed Nick, opening his eyes.

A reply was not needed, for Dagobert had already halted before a large and uncouth shanty, through whose cracks and open door came laughter, oaths, and snatches of drunken song.

"A nest of wolves," said the boy.

"Or men-grizzlies," added Dagobert, and then in a lower tone: "They're too near the bonanza to be left hyar without inspection. They may be in these parts fer a purpose."

Nick instantly thought of the carrier pigeon set free by the Cactus. Might it not have borne the spy's message to this mountain den?

His reflections, however, were soon cut short, for Dagobert had slid to the ground.

"Stay thar till I want you," he commanded.

Nick watched the burly figure of his companion as it approached the shanty, and held his breath as it crossed the threshold.

For a moment the laughter continued, and then it ceased as if a ghost had entered the place. Dagobert had disappeared.

If the young gold-hunter had peeped into the shanty he would have seen ten or twelve wild looking men staring at the burly intruder, who had ventured to disturb their revel. More than one bronzed hand rested on the butts of cocked revolvers, or touched the hilts of the Arizonian dirk.

It was a striking tableau.

There was one noticeable feature about these men which the captain could not fail to notice. They were dressed alike, dark brown shirts and corduroy pantaloons held up by wide leathern belts which contained their weapons. Not only were they clad alike, but on the breast of each man was the sign of some mystic order—a revolver crossed by a bowie.

"Hello!" cried one at last. "Ar' you huntin' our 'find? Wal, we're glad to git rid ov 'er."

Dagobert did not seem to understand.

"I'm huntin' whatever I kin find," he answered. "Whar's yours?"

The men exchanged glances.

"Bring 'er out!" ordered the leader of the twelve to some one behind him.

"Don't touch me! I am here."

Dagobert was seen to start as a girlish figure leaped from a corner behind several men, and halted in the middle of the room to stare at him.

"Oh, Heaven! you are no better than my rescuers," she exclaimed. "You are a wolf that belongs to another band."

The men burst into a fit of coarse laughter at Dagobert's expense.

"But I'm a stray wolf," he answered, addressing himself to the girl, although he glanced at the same time at the roughs before him. "Whar did you come from?"

There must have been a gleam in Dagobert's eyes that instantly won the girl. She came forward with a good deal of confidence.

"I am the survivor of our little train. The Navajoes attacked us; they killed all but me with their arrows, and I would not be here alive if those men had not come up."

"They saved you; stay with them," said Dagobert.

"No! no! You are going away from here. Take me with you!"

It was an appeal which only a heart of stone could have resisted.

"I'll take your find," speaking to the men.

"All right. We don't want 'er. Which way ar' you goin'?"

"Northeast."

"Alone?"

Dagobert did not hesitate.

"Alone!" he answered.

At that moment one of the men who had been leaning carelessly against one side of the room was seen to start. He turned half-way round as if he had received a communication from some person on the outside.

A stride took him to the leader of the band; their eyes met.

Dagobert pushed the girl toward the door.

"Go out!" he whispered, scarcely moving his lips. "Find my boy pard; mount and fly with him. I command it!"

The girl gave Dagobert a look and slipped away.

She had hardly disappeared when the head of the band said:

"You are Captain Flash, from Mohave."

Dagobert did not start; he seemed to be expecting such an accusation.

"You are not here alone," he continued in the same accusing tone. "A boy is waiting for you outside."

The captain's eyes flashed defiantly.

"So the Boss Cactus has just told you!" he said calmly.

It was the men's turn to start now, and revolvers glided from their belts.

"The pigeon found you, I guess, but it didn't tell you old Alapatha's secret. Not much!"

A grin lifted Dagobert's mustache; his eyes were twinkling merrily—laughing stars they seemed.

"Don't go back on the pigeon," he continued, seeing that his allusion to the Cactus's messenger had created a sensation. "I know it war sent,

an' you got the message, too. I am Cap'n Flash from Mohave. I am hyar alone now!"

Now? That meant that the person who had been waiting for him had departed.

The Marked Shirts understood him and started for the door.

"Not yet!" warned Dagobert, quietly, but with a firmness that conveyed a threat to his audience. "You can't leave this shanty now."

His long arms left his side as he spoke, and the mountain band looked into the muzzles of his deadly revolvers.

"I never kill only when I hev to," were the words that passed between the leveled weapons. "I possess the faculty ov usin' two revolvers at once, an' killin' with each. Lift one ov yer weepins an' I'll show you how I do it. I didn't l'arn the art in Mohave. I could shoot before I saw its shanties, ez one man before me knows."

He did not single out the man referred to, not even by a glance; but the band with one accord looked at their leader. He had grown pale above his rough beard, and his eyes were glaring tigerishly at Dagobert.

"Good-by!" said the Man with Two Names. "We'll meet ag'in. I kin shoot over my shoulder ez if I hed an eye in the back of my head!"

He stepped deliberately from the door as he finished, and not a pistol was lifted to bring him down.

The mountain band seemed unnerved or thunderstruck.

"Thunder!" suddenly cried a man who sprung into the shanty. "What use hez all my spyin' been? You've let 'em both git away."

It was the Boss Cactus of Arizona.

A howl of vengeance almost shook the roof of the building as the wild men, roused from their lethargy, darted forward.

But a figure—their leader's—leaped between them and the door.

"Don't be fools!" he cried, sternly. "We have the worst man west of the Rockies to deal with. He is called Captain Flash now, but I used to know him by another name. I am the man he referred to when he talked about his shootin'. He hez an eye in the back of his head. Look there!"

The speaker turned into the strong lamp-light as he uttered the last word and tore open his shirt.

The mountain wolves gathered before him, and stared at the ghastly bullet scar on his bronzed flesh.

"One of Captain Flash's valentines!" he said, grating his teeth. "I got it on the fourteenth ov February. Oughtn't I to recollect him?"

"Ov course, but thet doesn't stop the boy an' his secret!" retorted the Cactus.

"No!" yelled the crowd.

"I've follered 'em all the way from Mohave. They're goin' straight to the mountain ov gold. I know it. The bird war in our hands a minnit ago. Now it's back in the bush!"

CHAPTER IV.

A LASSO AND A HORSE'S TAIL.

NAVAJO NICK told the truth when he said that Alapatha, the white-haired war-chief of the Navajoes, was dead. The famous warrior

had met his death by the claws and the teeth of a real mountain grizzly, just as the young gold hunter had related to Captain Flash.

It was well known to the Navajoes that their chief had at some period of his life accidentally discovered a vein of gold whose wealth bordered on the marvelous. But knowing the greed of his people for that metal with which they could purchase "fire-water" and ammunition from the whites, he had persistently refused to divulge his secret.

The tribe viewed with a good deal of mistrust the white boy who rode into their village one day and boldly declared his intention to become a Navajo warrior. Not a few believed that he came for the purpose of worming from Alapatha the important secret.

The chief adopted him, took him into his lodge, and from that day Nick became to all intents and purposes a Navajo. If the boy was a spy he certainly played his cards well; he ingratiated himself into the chief's good graces and the two became inseparables.

A light akin to triumph burned in the youth's eyes while Alapatha, dying from wounds received in his tussle with the bear, told in gasps the secret he had guarded from his tribe so well.

The Indians had long believed that the boy was to become the custodian of the secret.

As Alapatha fell back dead, Nick started up with a cry of victory.

"At last!" fell from his lips. "At last, Dagobert, the secret is ours! I have not risked my life among these savage cut-throats for nothing."

Then the boy had been playing a deep game? Yes. "Nothing ventured nothing won," had been his motto.

A few minutes later he was flying from the Navajo country. We have seen how he reached Mohave City to find the man he sought, and how he and Dagobert found the rendezvous of the mountain men.

Now let us seek other scenes.

Not a great distance from the shanty in the valley a score of statue-like figures occupied the backs of as many horses.

They were Navajo Indians, who mentioned, as they conversed in low tones, the Indian name of our hero—Coresquah.

The majority of these braves carried in addition to gun and bow a stout lariat which lay in a coil on the right fore-shoulder of their steeds. A few had feathers twisted in their scalp-locks, but all had a band of dried buffalo-skin about their left arm between elbow and shoulder. This seemed to be a distinguishing mark, like the bowie and revolver on the bosoms of the mountain men.

It was such a mark, for if the entire Navajo nation had been inspected at that time, but twenty arms would have been found that bore that band.

We will call that scarlet twenty by the name which they had selected—the Brethren of the Buffalo Band!

They had a mission, one that was to send some of their number down the long trail of death.

Suddenly one of the twenty threw himself from his horse and put his ear to the ground,

and while he listened his companions watched him closely.

"Two horses!" ejaculated the Indian, rising quickly, and several lassoes were at once uncoiled while some arrows were fitted to the bow-strings.

"The big white wolves are hunting us," said one Navajo. "They come from their mountain den to strike the Indians who fell upon the train."

But the hoof-beats of the approaching horses shut off all further remarks, and the party drew aside to let the strangers come up.

"In the back!" passed from lip to lip as the elk-horn bows were drawn for the deadly shots.

"No, the lasso!" said the leader.

Instantly the bows were lowered, and those who had uncoiled their lariats prepared for the throw.

What was the Indians' surprise when, instead of two stalwart men they beheld a boy and girl on the horses that came up?

They started, and could hardly repress shouts of delight, for they recognized the boy.

The Indian leader uttered a short command which the young riders heard, but before they could prepare to meet the new danger, two lassoes dropped over their heads and they were unceremoniously jerked to the ground.

Black Mahomet stopped suddenly when he found himself relieved of his load, and the next moment, with a strange noise that sounded like a neigh of rage he plunged into the midst of the Navajoes that surrounded his master, scattering their scarlet bodies right and left.

But this gallant action did not rescue Nick. He was already held by a score of strong arms, and the horse was lassoed and secured. The girl, his companion, was likewise held, and the glistening eyes of the Navajoes shone everywhere around the captured twain.

Nick had ridden from one danger straight into another.

The Indians made no attempt to conceal their delight.

"Coresquah hunting for Alapatha's gold already?" exclaimed the leader. "Him pick up white girl somewhere, and they hunt together."

Nick's eyes answered the band. They shot bolts of defiance from their depths, and said plainly:

"I have the secret! Get it if you can."

"Navajoes no expect to find Coresquah here. The Great Spirit made him ride under their lassoes!"

"No. I was flying from wolves whose skin is white," said the boy. "I discover, though, that I have not bettered my condition."

Well might he speak thus.

He had fallen into the hands of the very Indians who had dogged his movements for four years. He knew them all; he knew, too, the significance of the buffalo band about their left arms.

He was led into the starlight, or to a spot where the shadows of the mountain trees did not lie.

There, divested of every weapon and with the lasso still encircling his throat, he was made to

face the scarlet twenty, whose eyes blazed with greed and vengeance.

"Coresquah heard Alapatha's secret before he died?" asked the head of the red league.

"He told me," was the answer.

"Where?"

The brief interrogation was not to be mistaken. The Indian is laconic. Nick understood him, but he merely shut his lips and smiled.

"Coresquah no tell, eh?"

"No."

The chief sent a quick, meanful glance among his followers.

"Bring Coresquah's horse."

A moment later Black Mahomet was led up, and recognized his young master with a joyful neigh.

"Coresquah will take a ride if he will not point out the trail to the mountain of yellow stones."

"Then I must ride."

Nick glanced at the girl—the waif of the train—as he answered the chief. There was a gleam of pride in her eyes; she approved his resolution.

One end of the lasso which encircled the young gold hunter's neck was made fast to Mahomet's luxuriant tail, but not until the hinder feet of the horse had elevated several of the would-be torturers.

The boy watched these proceedings with strange interest, but kept his lips stubbornly sealed. The doom to which his silence would subject him was horrible to contemplate, and he could not help fancying himself being dragged through the rough defiles of the Black Forest at the tail of his own faithful horse.

When the lasso had been fastened to Mahomet in a manner satisfactory to the leader of the league, every red face turned to our hero.

"Coresquah ready to answer now? Him sees what the Children of the Buffalo Band will do if him say 'no' ag'in. Let him speak."

Navajo Nick did not hesitate.

"I have not played Indian for four years to surrender to a pack of red wolves the results of the game my patience won," he exclaimed. "You've got your thumb-screws on the wrong person, Navajoes. I'd rather die a thousand times than tell you Alapatha's secret. It belongs to me. Now shoot your arrows into my horse. I am ready!"

The lips of the resolute gold hunter closed firmly behind the last word.

The Indian's threat meant all that it portended, and almost before Nick could brace his nerves for the ordeal, Black Mahomet bounded forward with a wild snort that was commingled with the twang of bow-strings.

The girl uttered a loud cry as Nick was jerked from his feet, and covered her face with her hands. But such action was not necessary, for the unfortunate Boy Gold Hunter disappeared in an instant, and almost too quick to be struck by the iron-tipped arrows discharged at him.

A chorus of savage yells followed Nick's disappearance. They echoed far through the lofty wooded lands on every side, and penetrated the starlit valleys below.

They reached the ears of a man who was turning the base of a hill not very far away.

This individual carried a revolver in either hand.

"Injuns!" he ejaculated, as he stopped and raised his head. "That war a Navajo yell ov vict'ry. I've heard it afore. Mebbe"—he stopped and drew a long breath of anxiety. "Mebbe they've caught my pard an' the gal. If they hev, an' if they harm the boy, they'll soon wish thet they hed never been born! I won't be Captain Flash to them. I'll be Dagobert!"

The man was really Dagobert, and as he sprung away the wild gallop of an unseen horse greeted his ears.

"At their old tricks, I'll bet my neck!" he said.

A few moments later the Man with two Names threw himself fearlessly before a magnificent black horse which came down the defile with head erect and mane streaming wildly in the mountain breeze.

He stopped the frightened steed by his wonderful strength, and subdued him with a few words.

It was Black Mahomet.

"Aha!" exclaimed Dagobert, catching sight of the dark cord dangling from the black steed's tail. "The meanest Injun trick ever done in America!"

He caught the lasso and leaped toward its unseen end, expecting to find his boy pard there; but the next moment he stopped and uttered a cry of amazement.

The rope was scarcely ten feet long, and as the giant stared at it, nooseless and without its captive, he could not but exclaim:

"What on earth hez become ov the boy? Ef he's dead the muntain ov gold ar' lost. Yes, whar is Navajo Nick, Dagobert's pard?"

The rope was flung madly to the ground.

"Dead er alive I'll find him!" he roared.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOUNTAIN POST-OFFICE.

CAPTAIN FLASH held Mahomet's bridle as he set out on the trail which he hoped would lead him to his young comrade.

The mountain paths were starlit and easily discernible, and the trail of the black steed not hard to distinguish.

The Man with two Names held a cocked revolver in his right hand as he pursued his way. Both eye and ear were on the alert, for Dagobert knew not how soon he would be called upon to encounter the Indians who had fastened Nick to the killing rope.

"It's kind o' curious," ejaculated the giant halting for a breathing spell as well as to give vent to his pent-up feelings. "I've got over a mile ov hill and valley an' no boy yit. I warn't a mile from them Injuns when they hollered—I'd bet my neck on thet; then why ain't I nigh Navajo?"

The next moment the man from Mohave uttered an exclamation of surprise and dropping the black courser's rein, he picked up a piece of rope at one end of which was a noose.

A lasso!

For several moments Dagobert scrutinized the "find" with great interest, and then permitted a sigh of relief to escape him.

"Not dead, that's sartain!" he said. "Hyar's

whar Nick an' Mahomet parted company. That stone hez an edge like a razor, jes' like hundreds ov other mountain rocks, an' it cut the rope clean off. Thet's what saved Nick, I kin see thet; but whar is the youngster now?"

Dagobert went on again. It was patent to him that, separated from his horse, Navajo Nick had disengaged himself from the noose and departed. The cord, then, could not have encircled the young gold hunter's neck; it must have slipped below his shoulders and preserved his life.

The giant argued thus when he resumed his tramp.

"I don't stop till I find the boy!" he said for the hundredth time.

But the next moment a voice made him halt.

"We're afoot an' the boy war mounted; think ov thet."

Dagobert vaulted into the saddle and turned his face toward the speaker.

"We kin keep on at any rate. We're gittin' nigher all the time; thar's some consolation in thet anyhow."

"The Twelve!" Dagobert said under his breath.

He and the horse were obscured by shadows utterly impenetrable. Not far away was a piece of ground rendered quite light by the starbeams.

The horseman fixed his eyes on the spot, and counted eleven figures that flitted like ghosts across it.

"Whar's the twelfth?" he asked himself.

Even while the interrogation still quivered his lips the twelfth person reached the star-lit ground and stopped. Dagobert leaned eagerly forward.

The man was scarcely thirty feet away.

For a moment he tried to pierce the shadows into which his companions had disappeared, and then as if satisfied that he was unobserved, he knelt on the ground and thrust his hand under a boulder which, in some past age, had rolled down the mountain-side.

Although Dagobert used his keen eyes to the best advantage, he was unable to determine whether the man took a paper from beneath the stone or deposited one there. At any rate he could detect nothing in his hand when he rose, and so he permitted him to glide on after the rest of the band.

"That's a queer perceedin'," said Captain Flash as he dismounted and sprung to the rock. "I'll jes' take a peep at thet message afore the owner gits it."

His long arm was soon thrust beneath the boulder and his fingers closed on a bit of paper which was hastily withdrawn. The giant rose with a glare of triumph in his eyes.

A stride took him back to his horse, and lifting a corner of the saddle skirt he produced a match. He seemed to hold his breath as the little stick slowly burned, and when a bright flame asserted its powers he darted at the paper; but the next instant blank disappointment covered his face.

He had read:

"Etnom: Ereh si trebogad. Solrac"

It was a communication whose brevity puz-

zled Dagobert as much as its untranslatable text.

"Hebrew — Greek er Latin? which?" exclaimed the giant staring at it in the dying light of his tiny torch. "Wal, it beats the crickets. English isn't good enough fur some people, but they must write their messages in some out-o'-the-way lingo and poke 'em under rocks. Ef I thought thet the other person 'd come arter this paper to-night, break my neck ef I would stay to receive him. 'Etnom!' I don't know 'im, but I could introduce myself in less than a minute," and the Arizonian smiled.

Dagobert struck another match and inspected the paper again, but with the same result. It told him nothing. He was not a good solver of mysteries; a riddle would have disgusted him.

His second match was flickering preparatory to going out when a footstep startled him. Dagobert extinguished the flame and turned.

Almost instantly he saw a figure nearing the rock, but whether it belonged to white or red he could not tell.

"Etnom!" ejaculated the giant. "He's comin' to his post-office."

A moment later the person reached the rock and stooped. Dagobert saw his hand disappear into the mountain letter-box.

"Nothin'! If he is playin' false I will turn on him!" said a deep voice as the person at the stone rose disappointed. "Two weeks an' nary letter—not a word!"

The Man with Two Names strode forward.

"Hyar's yer mail!" he said, tossing his "find" into the man's face as he turned with a startled oath. "An' I want you to read it fur me, too."

Dagobert's revolver almost touched the stranger's face.

"Pick it up an' read," commanded Captain Flash.

All this time the new-comer was trying to make out the *personnel* of the man who confronted him.

"You'll see me better by the light ov your match," said Dagobert. "You've got a lucifer somewhar about yer anatomy."

The stranger sullenly produced a match and picked up the paper.

He seemed as eager to peruse its contents as he was to view the man before him.

A glance seemed to acquaint him with the brief message. He started and seemed to gasp.

"Translate it!" cried Dagobert.

The next moment the match revealed the two men to each other.

"Dagobert himself!"

"Monte!"

The paper dropped once more to the ground where its owner put his heel on it.

Dagobert seemed about to throw himself upon the man who had spoken his name. The blazing of his eyes told of the tiger in his heart.

His enemy—for the man could be nothing less—was his match. He was tall, muscular, and dark like a Navajo giant. He had the wolfish eyes of the half-breed; a mass of long black hair touched the cape attached to his dingy jacket. In short, he was the very type of man who might be expected to patronize a mountain post-office.

"You haven't read the letter to me," continued Dagobert.

"There's no use in doing so," was the reply.

"You are here. That's what it said."

"Ah! I don't understand that. I tried to make it out, but—"

"You did not read the words backward. They said, 'Dagobert is here!' Etnom is Monte, an'—" the man paused.

"An' 'Solrac' is Carlos. Carlos!"

Dagobert's eyes flashed as he repeated the name. "Are you three still alive?"

"Yes."

"Where's Carlos?"

"Not far away. He brought the letter to the stone."

"I saw him, I did!" cried Dagobert. "And I did not kill him."

Monte looked surprised.

"We three still live," he said slowly, as if to taunt the man from Mohave. "I didn't expect to find you here, though; but the letter would have told me, don't you see?"

Captain Flash appeared to nod.

"Monte, what did I say when you three men tied me to my horse in the haunted valley of the Basaltic Buttes?" he said, slowly. "It was three to one then. What did I say?"

"Pshaw! you know!" cried Monte. "I am here. Do what you said you would if we ever met."

Dagobert's lips met; the revolver crept closer to the dark face before it, and then a stalwart form reeled from the flash that revealed it for a second.

"Two more!" ejaculated the Man with Two Names. "Monte was a leopard—the other two are tigers. I knew we war bound to meet some day. Now for Carlos an' the other one. But the boy first. This ar' only a divarsion. I never kill only when I hev to, an' this war one ov them cases."

He went back to the patient horse, and the next moment had led him past the silent form on the ground—the last caller at the mountain post-office.

He gave it but a glance as he went by.

"The wolves are gatherin' to doom," he murmured. "The mountain ov gold attracts them—the yellow bonanza and—Dagobert!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE HAND OF MONTE.

THE Brethren of the Buffalo Band did not turn their attention to the waif of the train until the horse had passed out of sight bearing Navajo Nick behind him.

Then they seemed to recall the fact that they had another captive to dispose of, and the next moment the girl found herself surrounded by the red-skins.

"I am ready," she said before the most eager could interrogate her. "After massacring the people of our little train, it is but fitting that you should slay the last survivor."

She drew her figure proudly up to its true height as she spoke, and looked straight into the tigerish eyes that regarded her.

"You will put an avenger out of your way by striking now," she continued. "I don't

know where the mountain of gold is, so you needn't question me about it. If I knew I would not tell you."

Her fearlessness rather commanded the respect of the Arabs of Arizona. They looked into each other's faces until not one knew what to suggest.

The girl seemed to enjoy their perplexity.

"You can make Helen Dayton an avenger by sparing her life," she said again. "I will thank you for the act, but only because it would give me license to kill every Navajo I met. My father was in the train. He fell at your first volley, and if the mountain men had not driven you off, one of your shafts would have slain me."

"White girl brave. She shall live to hunt the Navajo warriors. She is free."

Free! The waif of the train could hardly believe that she was free; but when the Indians stepped back and released her she knew that she was at liberty.

"They have some motive in this strange action," flashed through her mind. "I am free, but I feel that I shall be watched."

It was true. The Navajoes went back to their horses, mounted and rode away, leaving Helen half-bewildered on the ground of her sudden capture and release.

The country was strange to the girl. She was alone in the Black Forest of Arizona!

For several moments she remained where the band had left her, then she took up the trail of the horse which had carried Navajo Nick away.

"The horse, acquainted with these mountains, will seek some camp," she murmured. "It is my only hope."

The trail was discernible. Mahomet's hoofs had made impressions which any eye could see.

The girl kept on with increasing courage. Every now and then she looked behind her, but saw nothing. Still she was followed.

Two figures had left the Navajo band, and were creeping like mountain wolves after the survivor of the train. Their eyes never left her, for they had received instructions to follow her wherever she went.

If Helen could have seen her trailers her convictions would have been doubly confirmed; she would have known that the Brethren of the Buffalo Band believed that she knew the location of the mountain of gold, and that, by following her, they would surely discover Alapatha's secret.

Helen stopped all at once. Confident that she still followed Black Mahomet, she had not paid much attention to the hoof-prints in the defile for some time, and she found herself before a wooden shanty which she had cause to remember.

It was the rendezvous of the mountain men, but now it was dark and silent, although the door stood wide open.

"What fatality brings me back to this place?" exclaimed the girl. "I had hoped that I had seen the mountain wolves and their den for the last time, but here I am again, this time, thank Heaven! unseen by them."

She approached the place. The silence and the open door told her that it was deserted. She

listened at the portals for several minutes, during which she heard her heart beat.

"What if I could arm myself!" she suddenly thought. "If fate brought me back to this place, was it not for such a purpose?"

She hesitated no longer, but crossed the threshold and began to grope about the Stygian interior of the shanty.

At the same time the two red trailers glided up to the door and listened.

Helen found nothing for some time, and then only a match. Her joy at finding this little stick cannot be described. She quickly produced a light.

The flame that dazzled her eyes for a moment was not large; it did not reveal the entire interior of the mountain den, but it showed Helen enough to tell her that it was quite deserted—that the Marked Shirts in departing had left no weapon behind. But this was not all that the lucifer revealed. It showed Helen the couch of bearskins on which she had rested herself after her rescue by the twelve. They had not taken it with them, as if they expected her to use it again.

The match speedily went out leaving the girl in darkness once more; but she had seen enough.

"No weapons," she said. "Helpless yet."

The last sentence was full of that despair that takes possession of the hearts of persons in her situation. She instinctively groped her way to the cot and cast herself upon it.

"Only for a little rest," she said, half aloud. "I will not fall asleep. I must not."

But she could not overcome the drowsiness that follows fatigue, and she had hardly touched the pliable bearskins before she was asleep. The Indians listened at the door until they heard her regular breathings; then they crept away to watch the structure, and to wait for the awakening.

The tracked waif of the train slept peacefully for some hours when she was awakened by a strange noise. After she had opened her eyes she heard it again. Somebody seemed to be nailing something to the door of the den.

With her heart in her throat Helen listened until the noise ceased; then she crept toward the entrance. The night was wearing away; here and there the cold streaks of dawn were appearing.

When Helen reached the door she caught a glimpse of a figure that had a human shape; but it disappeared in an instant.

"He was here and made the noise that startled me," she said to herself. "What did he do? I will see."

She leaned out of the door as she spoke and saw the man's work.

It was this:

Fastened to the rough weather-boarding of the shanty by a huge bowie-knife was a human hand, and under the ghastly object was a piece of paper which contained some words traced by red keil!

The horrid sight drove all color from Helen Dayton's face; but curiosity took her beyond the door, and she read the words on the paper. They ran:

"Monte's right hand! I am on the track ov my old foes. I am hyar to find an' to kill. B-war'!"

"TREFOGAD."

The strange name at the bottom of the warning riveted the young girl's attention. If she had read it from right to left she might have ceased to stare, for it then would have recalled a name which she had heard fall from Navajo Nick's tongue.

Helen drew back into the shanty shuddering, but the next moment she heard the sharp crack of a revolver, and then the death-cry of an Indian. The report was followed by another before she could catch her breath, and when she looked out she beheld two Indians stretched on the ground not far away.

They were the trailers, though she knew it not, who had fallen before the certain eye of the Avenger.

A laugh full of triumph came through the increasing morning light, and Helen saw a man approach the Indians.

She started and held her breath as he came forward.

"A friend at last!" she exclaimed, springing over the threshold. "Ah! thank fortune for your return, Captain Flash."

The man looked up and started.

"The gal, by hokey!" fell from his lips, and when Helen paused at his side his eyes seemed to devour her.

"Whar's the boy?"

The girl hesitated. What! tell that man that his young *protege* had been lassoed and dragged to death by his own horse? No! she could not.

"I know about the lasso bizness," Dagobert said quickly. "I've been huntin' all night fur Nick, but hev'n't found a ha'r. He isn't in thar?" and he glanced at the shanty.

"No."

"Did he tell you anything about the bonanza—not a hint?" asked the man eagerly.

"Not a word."

"He knows how to keep a secret. We'll stick together till we find Nick. I'm glad I've found you. Gal, ef you hed ez many enemies ez I hev, you'd go into hysterics."

"Your enemies are mine!" she said, looking up into his face.

"I like that kind o' talk! Thar's blood in you, gal, ov the kind what tells. You heard me leavin' my mark on the shanty, eh? Thet hand war the bloodiest in Arizona. I've felt it at my throat; but not last night. You couldn't make out the name at the bottom ov my few remarks, I s'pose. It's my name, but my worst enemy I'arnt me to spell it backward last night. I'd like to be hyar when he reads thet paper!" and Dagobert's eyes blazed.

Helen went off with the giant.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER TUSSEL FOR THE SECRET.

THE sun was high in the heavens when twelve rough-looking men—veritable children of the mountains, drew rein on one of the densely-wooded slopes of the Black Forest, and gazed at a figure moving through a ravine some distance below them.

Their eyes burned with victory, and many an ejaculation of joy fell from their lips as they watched.

The object of their attention was a youth who,

hatless and dirt-begrimed, was pushing through the shadows which even at noonday lay in the ravine.

"The boy; the boy with the secret!" were the words in which they had recognized this person.

Navajo Nick was below them!

He had escaped the horrid fate to which the Brethren of the Buffalo Band had consigned him, and now, solitary and alone, he was going deeper and deeper into the unknown land that encompassed him.

"The gal isn't with 'im an' he's met with an accident, fur whar's his hoss?" said the leader of the mountain men, glancing at his nearest companion who was our old acquaintance, the Boss Cactus.

"I wouldn't be surprised, cap'n, ef he run ag'in' the Navajoes," was the answer.

"Doubtless, an' ef we let 'em go on he may run into 'em ag'in."

The eagles were ready to swoop down upon the quarry thus unexpectedly thrown before them, and the mountain slope was soon deserted.

Meanwhile, Nick, dreamless of the new foes near was pursuing his way. He presented the appearance of a person who had been dragged some distance at the end of a rope. Rocks and roots had scarred his face and torn his clothes; his introduction to the Black Forest had been by no means pleasant. Entirely without arms, he was unable to cope with the puniest enemy, and he was hurrying along as if, beyond the end of the gulch, then not far away, he expected to find help, friends.

"Halt!" rung suddenly in his ears.

The voice sounded like the knell of doom. The boy sprung back and looked ahead.

"Six devils!" he cried, as he looked into the muzzles of the rifles that covered his heart.

With the last word on his lips he involuntarily turned to fly.

"Six more!" he said, without taking a step. "They have stolen a march on me. I am completely hemmed in."

It was true. He was between the rifles of the mountain men.

"I see them for the first time, but I know them. They are the men Dagobert faced last night, the wolves who saved Helen, hunters like myself for the mountain gold."

At that moment his thoughts were interrupted.

"What is it, my kid? Life er death? Take yer choice." These words came over a horse's head, and from between a pair of lips raised slightly above the stock of a rifle.

"Say it quick!" continued the voice as Nick appeared to hesitate.

"I surrender!"

"That's bizness. Come for'ard, my mountain hollyhock."

Navajo Nick went up to the six he had discovered first.

When he reached the men they were joined by their companions, and he was quickly surrounded. His eye went from man to man as if he sought a particular person, and when it paused at a certain face, he shook with rage.

"Traitor!" he hissed. "You and your pigeon have triumphed for a time."

The Marked Shirt grinned.

"Wal, yes," he said, coarsely. "The Boss Cactus an' his pigeon ar' ez good ez a hand ov aces," and then he added; "Whar's yer pard Dag—Captain Flash?"

Nick started. The Cactus had not checked himself in time. He, too, knew Captain Flash as Dagobert.

"He isn't far away!" answered the Boy Gold Hunter.

"Don't lie, Blossom!" said another man, and the leader of the league. "We know better nor thet. You hev'n't seen *him* since last night. An' the gal?"

"I'll tell you all. I fell in with a band of Navajoes—my old comrades—last night. They lassoed me and tied the rope to my horse's tail. It was in the dim starlight, and just before the horse started, I got the noose below my shoulders. I was dragged some distance, but a stone that seemed to have an edge like a razor cut the lasso, and left me nearer death than life somewhere back yonder. I am here now, your prisoner. The girl I haven't seen since last night."

The Twelve could hardly contain their triumph, while the boy hurried through his brief narrative.

"We'll cut up thet stone fur breast-pins ef you'll take us to it," said the leader, unable to suppress his delight longer. "Ef it hedn't been fur it we wouldn't see you hyar in the flesh, boy. Don't you grasp the p'int?"

Nick evidently did, for he glared at the speaker.

The men, at a signal from their head, glided to the ground.

"It's coming now—the ordeal," thought the gold hunter.

"We don't stan' on ceremony, Blossom," said the captain sternly. "You know what we want to know; you wormed it out ov old Alapatha at last. The hull batch ov us couldn't hev got it out ov him with our peacemakers at his head. We'll own thet a bear helped you to the secret; but you got it just as hard. Now, what war it? Whar is the mountain of gold?"

"Where it has been since the creation," said the boy.

"No fun!" came over the revolver that had been thrust into Nick's face. "Of course it's been thet since the cr'ation, and we intend to leave it whar it stands now. We only want the linin', Blossom; the innards, so to speak."

The boy kept silent, and the deep-set eyes of the mountain men blazed as their impatience increased.

"The secret is mine!" said the gold seeker. "I won it, and I propose to keep it."

"Oh, you do, eh? Wal, we'll try you."

Five minutes later the boy was lashed to the nearest tree. His jacket had been torn off, and the upper part of his body was exposed to mountain wind and sun.

The Twelve had drawn back a few paces, and the Boss Cactus was putting the finishing touches to a terrible-looking whip made from a species of mountain undergrowth. It was five feet long, willowy and cutting, and fairly whistled as he cut the air with it.

Navajo Nick pressed his cheek against the

tree. Not a vestige of color remained on his face.

"Twenty doses ov this yarb kills!" said the voice of the Cactus at his shoulder, as he thrust the brutal whip before his eyes. "You kin keep yer mouth shut an' git the hull number, er tell the truth an' save yer skin. Ar' ye ready, cap'n?"

Nick drew a long breath.

"Now, Blossom, what ar' you goin' to do?" said the head of the mountain Twelve. "The secret er the whip?"

"The whip!"

A murmur of disappointment ran through the lawless group.

"Now let 'im have it, Cactus!"

The next instant the body of Navajo Nick actually left the ground, for the infernal lashes had descended on his back, and where they touched the skin was a gaping crimson line! Once, twice, three times the forest cat-o'-nine-tails descended upon the victim!

At the third blow the boy spoke.

"I've had enough!" he said.

The captain uttered a cry of joy and caught the mad arm about to deal the fourth blow.

"I thought we'd bring 'im to it," he said, as he stepped toward the gold hunter. "You've hed enough you say? I thought you war no fool, Blossom. You will tell us?"

"I will show you!"

"Thet's jes' ez good, ef you don't play us false," said the captain, a little suspicious.

"I will show you the mountain of gold. You can keep me all the time a hostage for my good behavior. There's enough there for all of us."

"Of course!" said the mountain men, as they gave each other a meaning wink. "Thar's nothin' mean about us, Blossom; we'll divide."

"Untie me first."

The cords were cut, and Nick leaned against the tree.

The lash had cut his flesh in a most cruel manner; he could scarcely stand.

"You will lead to the boss bonanza, an' no foolin'?"

"I have promised. If you don't believe me, give me the other seventeen strokes."

"We'll trust you, Blossom."

Navajo Nick gritted his teeth to bear the pain made by the rough dressing administered to his wounds.

When his jacket had been replaced he was placed on a horse before his old foe, the Cactus, and the captain turned to him.

"Ef you attempt to play us false, Blossom, we hunt the bonanza alone from thet moment," he said, slowly, "an' the vultures will hev another feast! So, bewar'! Now, which way?"

"To Navajo Canyon."

The entire Twelve started.

"Why, we're almost thar now!" exclaimed the captain.

"We must find it first," said Nick. "Forward!"

The ravine was deserted in a minute.

In the eyes of the mountain men was a wild look of triumph.

They were on the threshold of success; the

well-kept secret of the Navajo chief was theirs at last.

As for the boy, he did not speak, but every now and then a flash would appear in his eyes to vanish an instant later.

"Never mind, Dagobert, the great secret hasn't slipped through my fingers after all. I'm no traitor!"

He murmured thus a dozen times.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOHAVE BILL.

ALL day long the sun shone on the dead hand fastened to the boards of the mountain shanty.

Not far away lay the two Indians who had fallen before Dagobert's revolvers. Their last trail had ended at the same moment, and they lay dead side by side with the buffalo band, the sign of the red gold league on their rigid arms.

The prowling coyote visited the spot, and finding nothing to appease his appetite slunk away to other valleys.

The vicinity of the mountain men continued silent and deserted, until the cooling winds of the brief Arizonian twilight prevailed again. The hilt of the bowie no longer threw a hideous shadow over the dead hand; but the warning insecurely fastened to the weather-boarding fluttered in the breeze.

Not until that hour did a visitor come.

Then a horse stopped before the door, and a pair of eyes cold and steely stared at the mark of vengeance which Captain Flash, or Dagobert, had left behind.

"The hand of Monte!" read the man slowly and in a coarse voice that sounded a short distance away like the low growl of a grizzly.

He read the rest of the paper, the threat and the warning.

"So you are back, eh?" he suddenly exclaimed and then as his eyes seemed to emit sparks of flame he added:

"So am I!"

He leaped to the ground and leaving the leathern lines on his horse's neck wrenched the knife from the hand and secreted it in his bosom. The hand he laid on the doorstep. Then turning again to the warning he suddenly drew a dagger of his own and plunged it through the paper as if it had been the heart of his bitterest foe.

All the time he kept muttering: "*I am here!*"

In appearance this man bore a striking resemblance to the leader of the mountain men; he had the same physique, the black beard, the same gray eyes and bushy eyebrows.

But there was one marked difference. This person had but one hand! If he was thus crippled, he carried two revolvers; as if to his left wrist a good hand hung.

"The right hand by hokey!" he exclaimed, picking up the dead hand in whose palm gaped the wounds made by the Avenger's dirk. "I didn't think, Monte, when we parted company in the Gold Range two months ago, thet when I took yer hand ag'in thar'd be no man nigh it. The last words I said to you war: 'Keep an eye open for Dagobert.' I wonder if he did steal a march on you, Monte? Ef you're livin' we've got two hands left fur 'im. Two of the

best hands in Arizony. He took my left hand because it war nighest my heart; an' yer right one because it war the hand that choked him in the haunted valley ov the Basaltic Buttes. Ho! ho! Monte, we must take both his to get even."

The man took a knife and scooped out a bit of earth until he had made an excavation deep enough to receive the hand, and having buried it he went back to the horse.

A moment later he was again in the saddle and riding slowly down the valley trail that led to the spot where the blackened body of Monte still incumbered the ground.

The keen-eyed horse noticed it before his master, and started back with a snort of terror.

"What is it?" exclaimed the man, getting down. "Somebody what needs plantin', thet's sartain. Mebbe it's—"

He stopped, for he had seen the disfigured face.

"He wouldn't take a good photograph now whoever he is," he went on, "If he's got two hands—only one, by Jupiter! It's Monte!"

The man dropped the arm he had partly raised and sprung erect with the roar of a wild beast.

"Monte, an' killed by him!" he cried. "Now, Dagobert, look out. I had almost quit huntin' fur you, although you took my hand. You took it fair. I didn't squeal; but hyar lies the biggest heart in Arizony. I don't care ef Monte war a half-breed—ef his mother war a Pimo squaw. He never shook a friend, nor stole a keerd from the deck. He watched me through the small-pox on the Gila, and fought his way through livin' bowies to me in Mohave. He carried me three days on his back through the snows of Colorado. He war my pard, an' with Mohave Bill thet means everything!"

The man paused to get his breath; he was a statue of passion, a whirlwind of rage.

"I sw'ar, Monte, to foller the killer!" he cried. "I hunt him from this moment like the wolf hunts the deer, but with greater hatred. I hev'n't much education, but I've l'arnt how to avenge my pards, an' I'm at the head ov the class when it comes to killin'. He sba'n't escape Mohave Bill. I'm his livin' judgment, an' I'll find 'im ez surely ez death will. I came hyar to find Carlos, but I find you, Monte. I hope I may never see the cap'n until I hev settled accounts with Dagobert."

The Avenger drew the body into some heavy mountain bushes near by, and when he came out his lips were clinched and there was a cold glitter in his gray orbs.

Without a word he sprung again to saddle and resumed his journey, but this time he went faster than before, for the strong-limbed horse bore him rapidly over the ground.

He seemed to know where to find the man he wanted to meet, for he dashed like a pursuing spirit through valley and canyon, and made his steed leap mountain creeks which at other times he would have avoided.

Day was breaking as the man-hunter entered a gulch whose walls towered several hundred feet above his slouched hat. On either side were numerous fissures like the mouths of caves, and some were large enough to hold a company of men. Not a few of these suspicious places were

half concealed by bushes that take root only in the canyons of the Southwest.

Mohave Bill did not seem to notice them. He kept his gaze straight ahead.

All at once his steed uttered a snort and shied, and the next moment six or eight half-naked figures leaped tiger-like from several of these dark niches, and sprung at his horse's head.

"Injuns!" grated the man. "They can't keep me from Dagobert. They're fools to try it!"

The red pests of the canyon were at his animal's bit; their arms were trying to drag him from the saddle.

Instantly the reins fell from the man's only hand and were caught by a little contrivance on the front of the saddle from which nobody on the ground could tear them.

At the same time two vigorous kicks shook several would-be captors loose, and the Avenger was shooting his way clear with a ponderous Colt which he wielded like a toy pistol.

"Stop Mohave Bill? stop the earth!" he shouted, as several Indians staggered back from the flashes of that weapon of death. "I'm on a business thet mustn't be interfered with. Cl'ar the track! I'm death on his pale hoss. Stop Mohave Bill? Stop lightnin'!"

A dozen Indians leaped at this juncture to their comrades' assistance, but vainly. The excited horse, struck madly by the madman's spurs, dashed through the barriers of flesh, and Mohave Bill, swaying from side to side, crushed more than one head with the empty, but clubbed revolver.

He scattered them like chaff, and sent a laugh of defiance over his shoulder as the arrows sent after him fell short of their mark.

Beyond the gulch he stopped and turned his face toward his battle-field.

He rose in his broad Mexican stirrups, took off his hat and brought it down with emphasis on the strong neck of his gallant horse.

"Stop Mohave Bill? Stop a comet!" he cried till the mountain woods around and above him repeated the words.

"Me an' my boys ar' a pair o' trumps; ain't we, Gold-bug? Nothin' stops me this side ov Dagobert; Injuns, grizzlies, earthquakes!—nothin'!"

Mohave Bill was an enemy worth having. He was worthy to grapple with the Man with Two Names.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REVOLVER STILL SPEAKS.

THE Indians did not follow Mohave Bill.

Six lay prostrate on the ground, victims of his unerring aim and the strength of his arm.

He had passed through their midst like a thunderbolt, or like a demon of death who leaves his mark behind.

At the end of the gulch as we have seen Dagobert's foe was giving vent to his exuberant feelings. His scarlet enemies might have stolen down the ravine and shot him; but they did not think of such a thing until he had turned and darted away once more.

The six bodies were carried into one of the niches and the rest of the red gold league formed a group in the gulch. There they held their right hands up and swore to hunt down the

man who had reduced the numbers of their band.

Meanwhile, Mohave Bill was riding on. He was no longer dashing on through the morning light with nothing to guide him, but certain impressions on the mountain road told him that a number of horses had lately passed over it.

He noticed the hoof-prints as he rode on, and seemed to recognize them, although they did not differ from those usually made by a company of cavalry horses.

"What am I follerin' Carlos fer?" he suddenly asked himself aloud. "Oh, I promised to see him ez soon ez I got back to these parts, but I might hunt Dagobert first, and avenge Monte. Thar war three ov us once; but thar's only two now, with three good hands between us—not enough to wear two pa'r ov gloves. I'll kinder break my word by goin' on till I find Carlos and the tigers thet foller him. Won't his eyes blaze when I tell 'im about Monte!"

An hour later twelve men drew rein and stopped in a wooded valley to listen to the echo of a shrill neigh that had caused them to lift their heads.

"Captain Flash," said more than one.

"No," answered their leader, under his breath.

"It is not Dagobert, but Mohave Bill."

The last speaker was not mistaken, for all at once a horseman appeared on the side of a mountain above them. His figure was outlined against the blue sky.

"Mohave! I knew it!" exclaimed the captain of the Twelve, and he signaled the elevated person with his hat.

An answering signal came down the mountain, and the horseman disappeared.

Ten minutes later he appeared in the valley, and in full view of the men who were waiting impatiently for him.

He rode up to the band with the old icy gleam in his gray eyes, and was met by the rough leader with a hearty, "How are ye, Mohave?"

The salutation was scarcely returned, and when Mohave Bill refused the bronzed hand thrust forward for a shake, Carlos started and gave him a look of wonder.

"My hand touches no livin' man till it touches Dagobert!" he said. "He took the best hand Monte had last night."

"What?"

"He nailed it to the door ov the shanty with the knife thet cut it off."

The eyes of Carlos fairly blazed. He seemed about to leap from the saddle at the man who was talking.

"I saw the hand. I found Monte. His face war rather homely, er what thar war left ov it. I planted hand an' karkiss. Mohave Bill ar' a livin' judgment; death in the saddle."

The whirlwind of rage was again moving in the Avenger's breast.

"We saw 'im last night!" Carlos said.

"Monte?"

"No, Dagobert."

"An' you did not kill him!"

"He had the drop on us."

"On you, Carlos?—on yer tigers?" cried Mohave Bill, incredulous. "Tell me thet ag'in. Mebbe I did not understand you. I hope not. The drop on you, pard?"

"On me—on all of us!" replied Carlos.

"You ought to be shot!"

"Mebbe so, but Bill, you warn't thar an' you don't know—"

"Don't tell me!" flashed Monte's Avenger.

"He got the drop on you; thet's enough. He'll never git it on Mohave!—never!"

Carlos smiled half-contemptuously and his eyes seemed to say: "Just wait, boaster."

"But we kin stand the advantage Dagobert got ov us last night since we've found the mountain ov gold."

"Found it? How?"

"By Dagobert's pard, the boy what we've watched fer four years. Watchin' an waitin' pays Mohave."

Mohave Bill did not hear Carlos's observation for his eyes had singled Navajo Nick out from among the horsemen a few paces behind his friend.

"Ah!" suddenly parted his lips as he went forward.

"Don't touch the boy! He's worth his weight in gold!" cried Carlos, starting.

"Never you mind, pard."

Monte's Avenger went on with his eyes riveted on our young gold hunter who met his glare with undaunted gaze.

When near enough, Mohave Bill leaned forward and his great hand descended on Nick's shoulder like a tiger's paw.

"So you ar' Dagobert's pard!" he hissed, madly. "Did you touch Monte last night?"

"Monte?" asked our hero, to whom the name was new.

"Yes; Monte!"

"I never saw him."

"Thet's so, Bill," said Carlos whose hand fell on the Avenger's arm. "I kin vouch fur the truth ov thet statement. Blossom warn't with Dagobert when he met Monte."

The hand of bronze still lingered on Nick's shoulder: the eyes that regarded him still retained their bloodthirsty, tigerish glare.

"Ef I thought you war shieldin' him to save the golden secret I'd give his brains to the winds," said Mohave. "I kin live without the mountain ov gold. It's a big humbug anyhow, er a chimney thet deceived the eyes ov thet Injun chief. Yes, ef I thought ye war humbuggin' me I'd empty one saddle in this crowd."

The mountain man seemed to gasp. If Mohave Bill should carry out his threat, then good-bye to the secret soon to be revealed through the boy captive.

All breathed free when the half-breed Avenger's hand left Navajo Nick's shoulder, and his burly figure straightened in the saddle.

The crisis was passed.

"We'll begin to see daylight at Navajo Canyon," said Carlos to Mohave. "The boys says so."

"Gold! gold! nothin' but gold!" sneered the Avenger. "You don't keer fur Monte, the man what let himself down into the Black Gulch by a piece ov rope an' snatched you from the jaws ov death! You ain't Carlos any more because you forget!"

A wild oath burst from the captain's throat, and whirling upon the speaker he tore open his hunting shirt and exposed the scar which the night before he had shown to his men.

"Can I forget while I carry this, Mohave?"

"Cut it out and throw it to the coyotes!" grated the Avenger. "A man who will hunt fur a gold mine while the person lives who made sech a scar ez thet, oughtn't to hev a pard; but you hev twelve!"

Carlos winced.

"Well, keep it. I don't want you to hunt Dagobert. I am Monte's Avenger. Go an' find yer gold mine—ef you kin! I'll find a heart long afore you see the shinin' stones."

Mohave Bill picked up the lines which he had dropped to clutch our hero's shoulder, and prepared to ride on.

"Mohave?"

"Talk to the winds! You ain't the same Carlos what fought Dagobert with me an' Monte among the Basaltic Buttes. Thet Carlos war a mountain lion; the one I talk to now is a different kind ov animal."

The last words cut to the bone.

Carlos darted at Mohave Bill, but a barrier of arms interposed.

"I wouldn't touch him," said the Avenger.

"He could spit in my face an' I wouldn't lift my hand, because we used to be pards. I never furgit!"

The eyes of the leader of the Twelve dropped abashed.

Mohave Bill rode slowly off; but suddenly his horse stopped, and whipping out his deadly revolver, he turned half way round in the saddle.

"The boy hez got the secret, an' the mountain ov gold will make a fool ov Carlos!" fell from his lips. "Besides, the young 'un was Dagobert's pard last night!"

The Twelve saw the Avenger's movements and seemed to divine his intention.

Carlos uttered a cry of rage, and the Boss Cactus hastened to snatch Navajo Nick from his saddle. Six revolvers were drawn and lifted against Mohave Bill, but too late.

His formidable weapon spoke hoarsely before a mountain man could cover him, and the Boy Gold Hunter pitched backward with a cry which drew a responsive oath from the lips of the Twelve.

Mohave Bill had shot the secret from their hands!

CHAPTER X.

IN NAVAJO CANYON.

"NAVAJO CANYON? I've been hyar afore. Things look kind o' nat'ral. I recognize them ragged rocks up thar an' thet petrified tree. I left this place ruther sudden like. A yellin' tribe ov Navajoes war behind me, an'— But why tell the story to you, gal? No use ov it; not a bit."

Dagobert and Helen had reached the famous gulch, which is one of the wonders of Northern Arizona. The remnant of a once mighty river wandered through it; once it hissed and bubbled between the stony walls that towered for seven hundred feet above it, but now it would not float the lightest of Indian canoes. The sunlight seldom kissed the tiny stream; from wall to wall cooling shadows lay all day long.

Along the right hand wall when one entered from the west, ran a well-beaten bridle-path, but Dagobert and his companion had not yet

chosen it, for the Man with Two Names had stopped at the mouth of the canyon to survey it as he had done before.

"You have been here before you say?" said Helen, looking into his bearded face.

"Wal, yes. I war after the same trail I'm on now."

"The mountain of gold!"

"Jes' so. You see we always had an idea thet it was somewhar in this part ov creation."

"We?" asked Helen curiously.

"Me an' Nick. We came up hyar an' ransacked this whole kentry but found nothin'. Thar isn't a cave nor a canyon hyar thet I don't know. Wal, arter we hod tramped it over an' over fer a year er so, a bright scheme popped into my head. It war to send Nick into the Injun camp whar he war to live until he got old Alapatha's secret. The boy, a mere baby then, didn't flinch; he ruther liked the plan, an' one day he left me. We made an agreement thet he wasn't to leave the Injuns until he had the secret. I went to Mohave City, an' thar I war Captain Flash fur four years. The youngster hed grit; he's the boss boy ov these parts. Four years! jes' think ov it. I waited fer him to come to Mohave, for he war bound to come some time, the sun warn't surer to rise than thet. Wal, he did come!" and Dagobert's eyes lit up with triumph. "An' he hed the secret, too! But he war follered—follered by a cussid spy who carried a pigeon in his bosom. We set out fer this canyon the same night he got to me, but he ain't hyar now. You hev given me hope gal; you say thet the Injun lasso dropped over Nick's shoulders jes' afore his hoss started—"

"I thought so at any rate."

"Then it did! The boy ain't dead!" exclaimed Dagobert. "He may hev forgotten whar this canyon is an' he may not. If he hez not under the existin' circumstances I hev thought best to come hyar. No use to hunt 'im back yonder in the Black Forest. We started fur Navajo Canyon; an' he, hevin' lost me, would naturally seek me hyar."

Helen could not but admit the logic contained in Dagobert's conclusions, and her gaze went down the famous canyon as if she expected to see the figure of Navajo Nick.

But the shadows did not yield up the adventurous boy.

"In the first place we must find a ranch," continued Captain Flash. "We'll try our old one."

A few minutes later the couple entered a cavern, into which a tall man could easily ride, and Helen slid from Dagobert's arms to the ground.

"This war our headquarters four years ago," said the man.

A match soon dissipated a portion of the gloom, and a fire kindled on the cavern floor revealed the interior of the place. Helen knew the gulches of Arizona abounded in such caves, and she did not, therefore, express any astonishment at the dimensions of the one into which her companion had conducted her.

All at once she heard a strange exclamation, and saw Dagobert, torch in hand, staring at some writing on one of the grayish walls.

"They've been hyar, too!" he said, without

seeing her approach. "Now, I kin read the name ov every man."

Curiously enough on the wall before Dagobert were twelve names, headed by the word "Carlos," and the man from Mohave pronounced each one in tones of eternal hatred.

"What! you hyar, gal?" exclaimed the gold hunter, noticing Helen at his side. "Wal, thar they ar', the doomed Twelve of Arizona. They've been hyar since I hev, an' they registered on the book thet lasts forever."

The names had been cut into the wall, and by the hand of no novice, either, as Dagobert had discovered by running his bronzed fingers over the surface.

"I'm goin' to l'arn 'em by heart," he said, smiling. "One ov these days when I git the drop on the hull gang, ez I hed the other night, I'll call 'em by name. Then I'll proceed to kill!"

"How you must hate them, Dagobert," said Helen.

"Hate 'em? wal I should smile," was the answer. "They ain't all hyar, though. One is missin'—Mohave Bill."

"And Monte!"

"Monte? I had furgotten him already. Ef he war livin' him an' Mohave would save money by buyin' one pa'r ov gloves between 'em."

Dagobert laughed maliciously as he spoke.

"Helen!" he said, wheeling suddenly upon the waif of the train and speaking her name for the first time. "I wish you hed never reached this wild kentry. It isn't the place fur you, but while you ar' hyar I'm yer pectorator. Man lives on man in Arizona; red hunts white, and white trails red, jes' like so many wild animals. I've carried my life in my hands fur fifteen years among these canyons, but not all the time fur one object. I've been lookin' fur the mountain ov gold—"

"Which may not exist."

"Now you've left the track," said Dagobert, quickly. "It does exist. Thar's lots ov gold in this region. I hev proof ov that."

"Proof?" echoed Helen.

"Yes; thet is ef I can find suthin' I hid last summer. Stay hyar a while."

Dagobert selected a new flambeau from the fire and hurried away. Helen watched his torch until it became like a distant star, and finally disappeared. Then she sat down at the edge of the firelight, and thought of her changed fortunes.

A week before she was the happiest person in the little wagon train moving slowly toward Tucson; now, the sole survivor of the devoted emigrants, she was the companion of a strange man whose thoughts dwelt constantly on two things—gold and vengeance. She had trusted to his guidance, for she had no one else to trust, and now she was alone in one of the deserted canyons of Arizona, dreamless of what an hour might bring forth.

The minutes wore away, but the Man with Two Names did not come back.

The girl grew impatient, restless, at last fearful.

She rose and went to the corridor amid whose gloom the strange man's torch had burned last

for her eyes. But not a glimmer, not a flash rewarded her.

The corridor went upward like a stairway; Helen saw the rough stone steps which Dagobert had lately trod. Did they lead to the top of the canyon seven hundred feet above? No human hand had ever quarried out those countless steps; nature's chisel and that alone had formed them.

Helen held her breath as she looked and listened at the bottom of the stair.

Suddenly she started and uttered a cry of hope.

Something was falling down the steps, bounding from stone to stone like a pebble loosened above.

"Dagobert at last," said Helen.

Nearer and nearer came the descending object still unseen. It had a metallic ring, but the girl did not notice this. She drew back to let the stone fall into the light, and just at the right time for the next second it jumped from the bottom step like a thing of life and lay at her feet.

The waif of the train drew back, an exclamation of horror on her lips, and her eyes, dilated and ready to start from their sockets, glared at the object which had come down the stony steps.

It was not a rock, but a huge bowie-knife and one which she recognized!

"Merciful heavens! it is the bowie which I saw last sticking through the dead hand at the mountain den!" she exclaimed, almost shrinking from the blade. "Yes, it is the same! Dagobert left it there when we rode from the spot. Now it is here! What has happened above me? and who brought that knife to this place?"

Helen was answered only by the echo of her voice, and, becoming calmer, she picked up the dirk. Her eyes had not deceived her; the hilt was the hilt she had seen on Monte's hand; but the blade, broken at the point, was now covered with a moisture that drove a shudder through her heart. It was somebody's blood, Dagobert's most likely, for the knife had evidently been used above the stair by an enemy.

The girl found herself listening once more at the foot of the stairway.

"Come what may, I am going up," she said, resolutely, as her hand tightened around the hilt of the bowie. "Dagobert and I are friends. His enemies are mine. I have told him this. I will prove it!"

Our heroine sprung into the darkened corridor and began to ascend. The ascent was not difficult, but it promised to be an endless one.

After awhile Helen paused for breath. All was darkness above and below; she did not know how near the top she was.

Suddenly her heart stood still. A wild rough voice had assailed her ears.

"Now down you go. Cl'ar the track;" it said.

Helen instinctively hugged one of the walls of the underground stair. The voice which sounded like Dagobert's seemed to tell her that she was in danger of being hurled to the bottom by something about to be thrown down the causeway.

Nor was she mistaken. A moment later an object that could not be seen shot past her like a descending boulder, and the girl uttered a cry of terror.

It was not a rock but a man, for a hand had actually brushed her cheek!

Helen did not hear the sickening thud that came up from below an instant later, for with a swooning cry she, brave as she was, sunk on the stones, and the crimson bowie dropped from her nerveless hand.

The wail could not have been heard for nobody came down the natural stair.

By and by Helen opened her eyes; darkness still surrounded her, and eager to escape its thrall she crept down the steps. She shuddered when she thought of the sight that would greet her eyes at the foot of the stones if the fire still burned in the cavern. She could not escape it, and therefore she went forward emboldened by the inevitable.

The fire was still alive, and the waif of the train saw a human figure lying on the rocky floor of the cave. She approached and bent over it.

Before her lay the man who had been hurled down the stairway.

Helen saw that he was an Indian, and as she gazed he opened his eyes, gasped once and died.

The girl turned away. She had seen many Indians; to her they were all alike.

She did not notice that this one had a band around his left arm—a band made from the hide of a buffalo.

A member of the League of the Buffalo Band!

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN OLD FOES MEET.

WHAT had happened in the caverns above the waif of the train? Let us see.

When Dagobert left Helen, it was with the avowed purpose as we know of finding proof that the mountain of gold was not a myth. The light of triumph glittered in his eyes, as, torch in hand, he went up the steps. He had evidently scaled the ascent before.

"Ef the rocks ar' whar we left 'em four years ago, I'll make her eyes snap," he said, talking to himself, in a semi-audible tone. "They must be thar, for we war alone when we hid 'em."

Dagobert was not permitted to reach the top of the stair without having his thoughts turned into other channels.

Stopping suddenly, he put out his torch and drew his knife, then crept upward until the stair ended. He was on level ground, but far beneath him his keen eyes saw the light of the fire he had lately kindled.

"I'm not alone!" he thought. "Somebody's hyar besides Dagobert. Injuns, mebbe."

"I am hyar!"

Dagobert sprang back at the three words. They seemed to answer his thoughts, for he had not spoken aloud.

At the same time a hand struck his throat and closed upon it, but the giant tore it loose and grappled with its owner.

"So you ar' hyar, eh? I'm glad ov it. I don't want to take advantage ov you, though. You've

got but one hand. I've got two. Ef you'll go below, we'll fight equally. I'll tie one ov my hands, or the gal shall do it, an'—"

"No! I've seen Monte; that war worth two hands to me," was the answer, and again the speaker made a dart at Dagobert's trachea.

"Ar' you alone, Mohave?" asked the Man with Two Names.

"Alone? D'ye think I'd hunt you with a regimental band, an' a squad of helpers?"

"I know what you did among the Basaltics; you warn't alone then."

"But I am alone now!"

"You lie, Mohave!"

Dagobert's foe hissed forth an oath.

"You've got help with you. I hear 'em," said Dagobert.

"By my mother's grave! I came hyar alone; but ef—"

"Injuns!"

A heavy figure leaping from the gloom had fallen upon the enemies. They fell apart, striking madly with their knives at the new foe, who, whirling with a cry of pain, tore Mohave's dirk from his grasp and hurled it away. Striking near the landing of the stair, it fell forward, and bounding from stone to stone, leaped into the cave below to horrify the anxious girl.

Dagobert did not entirely relinquish his hold on the Indian; but securing it, he drove his bowie into his breast, and in a moment of rage bore him to the causeway, down which he flung him headlong.

Then he turned back to renew the struggle with his whiter antagonist, but no sign of his presence reached him.

"Whar ar' ye, Mohave?" he asked.

No answer.

"You're a coward as ov old!" grated Dagobert. "I've settled yer Injun an' am ready fur the rest ov the gang. Not alone, eh? No, ov course not! You hev'n't lost the faculty ov lyin' since you left the Basaltic Buttes. Why don't you come on?"

A sound more like the growl of an enraged tiger than the voice of a human being came from a point at Dagobert's right hand.

"Oh, thar you ar', eh?" exclaimed the Man with Two Names. "What ar' you holdin' back for?"

"You've disarmed me," came from the darkness. "Whar's my knife?"

"Haven't you got one, Mohave?"

"No. I struck the Injun with mine; he tore it out ov my hand. He warn't my Injun, Dagobert."

"We'll hunt for your knife. I mean to give you a fair show."

A moment later the deadly enemies were "feeling the ground" for the lost bowie which Dagobert little suspected had lately belonged to him. Their shoulders almost touched on several occasions, but neither uttered a word.

"Mebbe," said Dagobert, "it fell downstairs."

"P'r'aps," replied Mohave Bill. "You can't loan me a knife?"

"I hev but one now. I left one at the shanty the other night."

The one-handed Avenger let a cry escape him.

"That's the one I've lost!" he said.

Dagobert sprung up. The man before him was an enemy indeed; he had taken his bowie from Monte's dead hand and had been hunting him with it.

"You hev a revolver, Mohave?" he said.

"I hed one jes' afore I got hyar. My hoss stumbled an' throwed me over his head into the creek thet runs through the canyon, an' I lost my weepin. I'm helpless, Dagobert; but I want to fight you jes' ez bad."

"I'm sorry I kin help you in no way hyar," Dagobert said. "But ef you'll go down—"

"I'd go to the place ov torment to fight you!" was the interruption. "You killed Monte; thet is all I want to know, Dagobert."

"Yes, I did kill Monte; he's but one ov the three; you're another an' I'm goin' to sarve you the same way!"

"Not to-night!"

"To-night!"

Mohave Bill laughed.

"We'll go down an' see my old acquaintance," he said, "I'm eager to try conclusions with you."

As the stony stairway was wide enough to let two persons go down side by side, the enemies descended in that manner.

They stepped over the body of the Indian, evidently a spy belonging to red gold league, and looked at each other.

As they did so Helen uttered a cry of surprise and came forward; but Dagobert's look checked her. It told her that those two men were not friends.

A strange light appeared in the eyes of Mohave Bill as they encountered Helen.

"Purty ez a pink!" he murmured. "I wonder whar Dagobert diskivered thet bonanza. What a pard she'd make fur a man like me! By George! she's worth fightin' fur!"

Dagobert seemed to interpret the flash of his foeman's eyes.

"Yes, she's a blossom—a pearl!" he said. "She b'longs to me, Mohave. Now, ain't she a lily?"

"Whar's my knife?" cried the enemy.

"Did a knife come down the steps, gal?" asked the Man with Two Names.

"A bowie-knife? Yes."

Mohave Bill hailed the appearance of the avenging knife with an oath of joy.

"Hyar it is! Injun blood on it!" cried Dagobert, extending to Bill's one hand the knife which Helen proffered.

"I'll mix it with yours!" was the response, as Mohave stepped back and drew his figure to its natural hight.

"Stand back, gal."

Helen was not loth to shrink from the immediate presence of the two desperate characters, who, thirsting for one another's blood, stood face to face with bowies in their hands.

The gladiators glared at each other for a moment, then Mohave Bill sprung at Dagobert, who, braced to meet him, did nothing more than ward off the blow aimed at his heart.

They stood within arm's length of each other's hearts now.

A plunge forward, a momentary closing, three

mad blows by the strongest arms in the Navajo country and the men separated.

One reeled backward, dropping a bowie whose blade was red; the other stood erect, holding a knife crimsoned like its adversary.

"Monte kin sleep now!" cried the man who did not fall, as he glanced at the white-faced girl. "I told him, dead though he war, thet I'd avenge 'im. I promised to throw Dagobert's right hand on his grave in the bushes. I keep every oath I take!"

Mohave Bill strode toward Dagobert, who had fallen to the ground, with the brutal intention of cutting off the hand which had maimed him for life.

Helen did not seem to divine the victor's intention until he was crouched over the hand he wanted—nay, not until the fourteen-inch bowie almost touched it.

Then she sprung to the fire and caught up the revolver which Dagobert had left her for self-protection.

Mohave Bill saw her movement, and leaped up.

"See hyar, my mountain pink!" he exclaimed. "I'm master hyar. Drop thet weepin, er—"

The girl's answer was a pressure of the trigger, and the burly form of the half-breed's avenger reeled backward to fall across the body of his deadliest foe.

Helen stood for a moment bewildered in the smoke of her revolver, which she still held in her hand; then she sprung away. Dagobert's enemies were here as well, and she could not believe that the two lying before her—the Indian and Mohave Bill—were alone in the neighborhood.

The bowie had snatched her protector from her, and the fate of her remaining friend—Navajo Nick—was a matter of mystery.

Is it a wonder, then, that Black Mahomet, the faithful horse, soon afterward carried the waif of the train from the cave and into the great, gloomy canyon?

"I am alone, but I will find friends," said the girl. "I have one who must be alive. Guide me to him, Heaven; and together we will fight the men who hate us so terribly."

The next moment the horse went down the gulch, his shoes striking fire here and there on the rocks. He seemed to know that he was bearing the most precious of burdens. When he got beyond the mouth of the canyon his gait increased, but Helen held on.

What goaded Black Mahomet forward? She had no spurs.

"On, on he went, despite the girl's efforts to check him. At last, covered with foam and panting heavily, he halted in a little valley and turned his large eyes triumphantly upon his rider.

"You have carried me from some danger, but what kind I do not know," said Helen, looking down into Mahomet's face as she patted his hot neck.

At that moment the long howls of a pack of wolves faintly touched Helen's ears as if the night winds had wafted them a great distance.

The horse heard them, for he raised his head and listened.

"We shall be wolf-chased! On! on! Mahomet!" cried Helen.

But the animal could not be urged into a trot.

He knew that he had already carried his fair rider beyond the mountain hordes.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOSS CACTUS SURPRISED.

HELEN was not defenseless, for the revolver which she had kept in her hand since her exit from the canyon cave contained five charges.

To her, of course, the valley to which Black Mahomet had borne her was a strange place. Hemmed in by towering hills, densely wooded, and ghostly looking, it might well appear to her the valley of the shadow of Death.

The horse seemed loth to leave the place; he had distanced the wolves, and now he wanted to rest where he knew they would not find him. As for Helen, she desired to go on, but whither she knew not. Night was still about her; myriads of stars lit the sky, and a strange light seen through a pass told her that the moon rising over the horizon would soon afford the light that betrays fugitive people to their foes.

"We must go on!" she said, speaking to the horse. "On, on, till dawn at any rate, my good friend."

But Mahomet chose his own gait, and suddenly, to Helen's despair, he halted and began to back into the shadows that fringed one side of a mountain pass.

Almost at the same moment the girl heard a voice that made her start.

"The mountain men!" fell from her lips. "I came hither to fall back into their hands! I cannot wrestle with fate; the tide is against me."

The impulse which had caused the waif of the train to lift the revolver passed away as she concluded, and her hand fell again at her side. She kept the position to which the horse had forced her, and held her breath.

A company of rough men were approaching; that she knew, and, secretly guessing at their identity, she leaned forward to get a glimpse of the cavalcade.

Mahomet, with that wonderful instinct so often found in the horse, stood like a statue among the shades of the cliff. The pass was not wide, but Helen fervently prayed that the heavy boots of the mountain men would miss her as they rode by.

Although prepared for the sight our heroine started when her eyes fell upon the spectral cavalcade. She bent down, and tried to hide her figure behind the neck of her steed. She silently counted the figures, but all at once she uttered a faint cry.

There was one figure in the band which did not belong to it.

"The young gold hunter as I live!" ejaculated Helen. "And a prisoner too! Ah! the lasso did not finish him. Dagobert was right when he said that he was alive somewhere; but Dagobert is dead now. They will never continue the hunt for the mountain of gold! A captive! and in the hands of a band that will have his secret or his blood."

Helen did not know that the Twelve had al-

ready drawn the latter, nor that Navajo Nick, at that moment, was apparently guiding the league to the precious mountain.

Her joy at beholding the Boy Gold Hunter alive equaled her dismay at finding him a prisoner in the midst of the deadliest revolvers in Arizona. She saw that a handkerchief had been bound about his head as if to bandage a wound. Beneath it the face of the boy was pale, almost white; but his eyes burned with the brilliancy of stars.

Neither the girl or the horse moved while the rough men of the Black Forest were filing by.

Their numbers had been slightly augmented; the boy made the thirteenth rider.

"My fortunes are linked to his," Helen said.

"He is the only friend I have left. He saved me once, and I must pay him in like coin if I can. I will not desert him!"

Black Mahomet seemed to know what was wanted of him, for when Helen turned his head toward the mountain men he did not resist, although he was going back toward Navajo Canyon.

But before a mile had been traversed he stopped, and began to back from the trail.

"This horse is worth his weight in gold," thought Helen. "Some person is coming back. What if the Twelve have discovered that I am following?"

A horse was approaching, and a few moments later the girl saw the figure of his rider.

To her horror he drew rein so near that Helen might have touched him by leaning forward.

"It's kind o' queer," he said. "I heard a boss behind us, but now, bless me ef I hear a cricket. I've got to fix up some story before I go back, fur I told Carlos that I'd bet my life thar war a boss behind us. Fooled, by jingo! What's the matter with yer ears, Cactus?"

Helen started at the name. It was the cognomen of the man who had followed Nick from the Navajo country—the spy with the carrier pigeon.

"So you are the Boss Cactus? Well, I am here!" she said abruptly.

The mountain spy almost reeled from his saddle.

"You? Jehosaphat!" he cried. "A gal, by hokey!"

"A girl and an Avenger!" said Helen sternly through tightening lips. "You are looking into the revolver which has just killed one of your kind. Move, shout for help, or lift a hand, and I'll scatter your brains over moonshine and shadow!"

The Boss Cactus was at the mercy of the waif of the train. Her outstretched arm held a pistol against his face; his brain was at the mercy of the finger that rested lightly on the trigger.

"You've got me!" he said. "I never deny the truth. You hold a cold deck that would swamp the best ov the boys. What do you want with me?"

The spy of the Twelve was eager to treat with the girl; above all things, he wanted the revolver removed from his face. As he was wont to say: "The pesky thing might go off!"

"What do I want?" echoed Helen. "The truth first; obedience next."

"Wal, sail in," said the uneasy man.

"Whither are you bound now—the Twelve I mean?"

"To Navajo Canyon."

"And from there?"

"To the bonanza!"

Helen started.

"You've got the young gold hunter?"

"Of course. I see you know it, an' I might ez well tell the truth. We war bound to git 'im, gal. You can't keep a secret from Cap'n Carlos."

"But you have not obtained Nick's."

"Wal, we hev, er what is jes' ez good; he's leadin' 'em to the bonanza, to-night."

Helen's eyes said: "Impossible."

"We nearly lost it awhile back," continued the Cactus who seemed to be communicative.

"Mohave Bill shot him."

"Shot the boy?"

"Wal, yas. But the bullet only plowed along his temple. By Georgel it war a close shave!"

The girl seemed to shudder, but at the same time her eyes grew bright with a strange triumph. Perhaps her thoughts had gone back to her deed in the canyon cave. Mohave Bill had attempted Navajo Nick's life, and she, without knowing it had avenged the dastardly shot.

"Where is Mohave Bill?" she asked the Cactus in a curious tone.

"He got away."

"I found him."

"Whar?"

"In Navajo Canyon as you call it. I left him there—dead!"

An oath dropped from the spy's lips.

"Don't you ever let Carlos find thet out," he said:

"Why not?"

"They war pards; the one would die fur the other ef they did part in bad humor when Mohave shot the gold boy. You're a gal, pretty an' all thet, but don't let Carlos know thet you wiped Mohave out. He'd tear you like a tiger tears an antelope!"

"Do you think I fear your captain?" flashed the girl quickly. "In this country, as I am fast learning, one must fear nothing. Now for the second part; obedience. I am going to let you go back to your partners."

The Cactus appeared to breathe freer.

"But not unconditionally," continued Helen.

"You mus first swear that you will obey me. You mountain men respect an oath. I have seen enough of your class to know that."

"When the Boss Cactus swears he plays fair," the spy said, gravely.

"Swear, taen, that you will carry a message to Navajo Nick from me, and that you will withhold from Captain Carlos the truth concerning your meeting with the person who slew Mohave!"

The long hand of the Cactus was lifted, and from beneath his mustache came the monosyllables, "I sw'ar!"

"Now, go back and tell the boy secretly that I am near, that I will be nearer still when he needs me."

Helen paused abruptly as if she hesitated at the threshold of imparting some important news.

No! she would not tell Nick that Dagobert was dead, to discourage him, and make the eyes of the man before her glisten with joy.

"Is that all?" asked the Cactus.

"That is all. Remember your oath. Go!"

"I'd like to say one word," said the man, hesitating. "I want to say fur yer own good thet you've been puttin' yerself to a good deal ov trouble fur nothin', fur nothin' at all. You can't buck ag'in' Cap'n Carlos an' his tigers. They've got the boy in their clutches, an' all earth can't take 'im out. Ef you know the way, go back, fur sooner er later he'll know thet you killed Mohave, an' then—why, then, yer life wouldn't be worth a sage bush! I don't charge anything fur this advice. I don't want Carlos an' his men to hunt a gal, but you can't help the boy. You might ez well try to rescue a rabbit from a cage ov wildcats."

Helen saw that the Cactus was in earnest; he seemed to have forgotten that she had lately thrust a cocked revolver into his face.

"However, I'll keep my oath to the letter," he went on; "but you can't keep the youngster from conductin' us to the bonanza."

"And after that?"

"It all depends on Cap'n Carlos."

"That settles it! Now I will go back. Go and keep your oath."

She dismissed the Cactus with a wave of the hand, and saw him ride away.

"Thet gal's a fool!" he grated, as his horse struck into a gallop. "Somehow or other she's enlisted my sympathy, an' bless me ef I don't feel like givin' her a lift!"

"You do, eh? There! take that, traitor!"

A revolver had flashed in the Boss Cactus's face, and betrayed by his own words, he reeled from the saddle to fall like a dead man on the ground.

"Mebbe I war a little hasty," said the slayer.

"But I believe in nippin' such treasons in the bud. So he saw a girl back thar; thar is but one in these parts! She heard the shot an' will keep away. Let her keep off. We ar' near the bonanza now; too near to be bothered by a girl."

The man was Captain Carlos, and the next moment, leading the spy's horse by the bridle, he galloped toward his men.

Scarcely had he passed beyond sight when the Boss Cactus stirred. All starlight shots are not deadly ones.

He got upon his feet and grated his teeth till they seemed to crack, while he listened to the receding hoof-beats of the two horses.

"We've dissolved partnership, Cap'n Carlos!" he hissed. "Ef you ever work thet gold mine, may the Boss Cactus marry the man in the moon! From this hour I am fur Dagobert, the young gold hunter, and the gal!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TWO LEAGUES OF GOLD.

CAPTAIN CARLOS found ten men waiting with great eagerness for his return. They were not mounted, but stood on the ground, each one behind his horse, and in their bronzed hands were repeating rifles.

What had happened?

"Injuns!" said several, in low and significant

tones, as their leader joined their ranks. "The red gold hunters, er we're not livin'!"

Carlos did not speak, but looked over the saddles as if he sought the position of the foe.

The mountain men glanced at the Cactus's steel, which had come back to them riderless. A few seemed about to ask the captain what had become of the spy. He saw their glances and said:

"Thar's a dozen ov us no longer. You heard the revolver? It wiped out the Boss Cactus. Whar ar' the Injuns? I don't see 'em, an' my eyes ar' ez good ez they ever war."

"Nobody's seen 'em, cap'n; but we've heard 'em, which ar' jes' ez good!"

"Not by a long shot," retorted Carlos. "You don't see an Injun, but you know they're up thar because you've heard suthin'—is thet it?"

The eyes of his followers dropped before his accusing look.

"We'll go forward. Mount!"

The order was obeyed, but the next instant the sharp cracks of Indian rifles awoke the echoes of the mountains, and one-half of the Twelve reeled from their saddles to strike the ground dead!

Captain Carlos grated his teeth.

"Down! the devils are going to charge us!"

It was true; the charging whoop of the Navajoes rung out like a clarion blast, and as the mountain men dropped behind their steeds once more their red foes came thundering forward.

They were permitted to approach until Carlos uttered the word "fire!" then six rifles emptied as many Navajo blankets, and the remainder of the band drew back.

"Keep it up!" said Carlos. "Don't give them time to reform."

The gold leaguers needed no such commands; they were continuing the battle and a perfect hail of lead was leaping from their deadly repeaters.

The Indians, unable to withstand such punishment, drew off, carrying with them those of their number who had fallen; but as they did so, they sent up a yell of defiance which told the mountaineers that they had by no means given up the contest.

Navajo Nick fought in self-defense among the gold-seekers. The first deadly volley of the Indians had spared him; in this it had proved more merciful than Mohave Bill's pistol. Besides, he hated the red foes; for had they not fastened him with a lasso to the tail of his own horse?

He knew that his smallest movement was watched by his captors even in the thickest of the nocturnal battle; but pretending not to notice this espionage, he fought as though the mountaineers were his comrades.

After the repulse a council of war was held, and the gold hunters discussed the propositions submitted by Captain Carlos.

It was Nick's first experience of the kind; but he took no part although he listened attentively. He was anxious to learn what Carlos would do.

It was decided to hold the ground till morning, for the mountaineers had sworn not to turn their backs on the mountain of gold, and in their leader's expressive words, they would "keep the vow or die!"

An hour of strange silence passed away; the wounded horses had been quietly put out of their misery, and side by side they lay in the starlight with their late riders.

The Boy Gold Hunter, crouching at the foot of a bush with a cocked carbine waited for a renewal of hostilities. Captain Carlos, thoughtful but a veritable watch-dog, almost touched him with his broad shoulders. The suspense was terrible.

"They are not going to attack us again," he ventured to Carlos. "They have left us."

"Don't you know the Navajoes any better than thet?" was the reply. "They will attack us ez sure ez death. I wish they would!"

As if to realize the captain's wish, a sound entered the silent camp; the men prepared to receive the charge.

"The tug ov war is hyar!" said Carlos. "We win er die. Let every shot tell. The man thet misses sha'n't hev a hand in the 'divide' when we get it."

Nick held his breath as he raised his carbine.

"Hyar they come!"

At that moment the foe that never sleeps—the red Indian—poured a volley into the gold league's camp, but it was badly aimed, and slew no one.

Quick as a flash the shots were answered, and then came the wild war-whoops of the second charge.

"Stan' firm!" cried Captain Carlos. "We win er die!"

As the Indians had a goodly distance to ride over before reaching the gold hunters they were compelled to do so in the face of a hail-storm of carbine-bullets which despite the uncertain light emptied a number of saddles.

Captain Carlos and Nick stood side by side, protected by two horses. The boy was actually a prisoner, for the leader of the Twelve had secured him to his own person with a stout lariat which encircled his waist. Carlos was determined that the boy with the secret should not be separated from him.

Those who assert that the Indian invariably shelters his body while fighting would have changed their opinion if they had seen the Navajoes riding fearlessly upon the death-dealing weapons of the determined enemies who opposed them.

The carbines were fired so incessantly and with such a deadly effect as they advanced that for a moment they recoiled. But a loud shout from their leader took them forward again, and they rode into the very jaws of death.

Our young hero saw Captain Carlos throw his carbine aside with an oath; it was empty; the foe was upon them; he could not reload.

Drawing his revolver the mountaineer thrust his long arms forward and fired with a rapidity that astonished Nick, who with an empty rifle could no longer assist in repelling the assault.

All this scene did not seem to last a minute. The valor of the Twelve did not appear to avail them aught. The last charge could not be resisted by a handful of men, desperate though they were. The Indians came down upon the camp like a pack of wolves maddened by the scent of blood.

"Come! You an' I fur the bonanza, boy!" said the harsh voice of Captain Carlos, and Nick felt himself almost lifted from the ground and hurried away.

He was not loth to leave the battle-field, not even when his conductor and preserver was the man who would have his secret or his blood.

Carlos had escaped at an opportune moment, and he and Navajo Nick did not pause until in a little gulch a mile away, they heard but the echoes of the Indians' yells.

"Let 'em cheat Carlos out ov the golden hill ef they can!" he exclaimed, his eyes flashing with triumph. "We're worth a hull nation ov dead men. There don't live the red-skins what kin beat our cold deck. Hit, eh?"

"I'm not hit," said Nick, starting.

"I thought you war from the way you looked. You don't see anything, do you?"

"No."

The boy's heart was beating strangely and well it might.

A shadow, if not a substance, was not far away; his stare had been seen by Carlos, but thanks to his presence of mind, it had not betrayed him.

"Dagobert!" thought the young gold hunter. "Dagobert, my friend! Ah! I knew you would not desert me."

What if the eager eyes of Captain Carlos should see the figure crouching scarcely ten feet away? A spring or a shot and the career of the would-be rescuer would be ended forever.

But the leader, and, perhaps, the sole survivor of the Mountain League did not see. He turned upon Nick after listening to the echoes of the battle awhile and asked abruptly:

"Do you know whar you ar'?"

The boy shook his head.

"We're within a hundred rods ov Navajo Canyon, our first objective p'int."

The boy started. Navajo Canyon! He could not forget the name. From that place he knew the actual hunt for the gold mountain must begin.

"So we are near the canyon?" he said. "Good! I am willing that we shall go to it. The sooner the better perhaps."

Captain Carlos started off and Nick followed. He was still lasso-joined to the man who wanted his secret.

Although the young gold-seeker was afraid to even glance over his shoulder, he believed that Dagobert was gliding along. The Man with Two Names could not think of deserting him in such a situation; Nick felt that he was only waiting for an opportunity.

All at once at the end of the narrow gulch a figure leaped between Captain Carlos and his prisoner.

A knife severed the lasso as it had been twine, and as the leader of the Twelve turned upon the rescuer he was flung away, revolvers and all, to fall in the shadows of the towering cliffs of Navajo Canyon.

Our hero uttered a cry of joy as Carlos reeled from the fist of his deliverer, and he did not hesitate to follow the hand that closed on his wrist, and led him away.

He was free at last! He and Dagobert had

met again to triumph over all their foes and to find and enjoy the riches of the hidden mountain.

"I'm payin' him back, cuss his onery pic-ters!" exclaimed the rescuer, as he halted.

"You did not think thet I'd turn on Carlos? No! I guess you didn't, from the way you stare. I'm the Boss Cactus ov Arizona. Who d'ye think I am?"

Navajo Nick could not speak; he could only stare into the wild face which, until that moment, he had thought belonged to his stanch friend Dagobert.

He instinctively recoiled from the sight.

"You'll git used to me," said the gaunt fellow, following him up, with a laugh. "I'm no sage-bush. I'm one ov the lost arts, as it were; a cactus whose spines sometimes kill! Me an' Cap'n Carlos hev dissolved. The Boss Cactus is your friend. You kin trust 'im. What d'yer say?"

Trust that spy? Nick thought of his first introduction to him, the carrier pigeon, and the face at the window in Mohave City.

"You think I'm settin' up a cold deck on ye," said the Cactus; "an' I don't blame you, either. I'll not ask you ag'in to trust me till you've tried me."

"Yes," replied Nick, "I'll try you first."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRAIL OF BLOOD.

THE man, upon whom the Boss Cactus leaped at the mouth of Navajo Canyon, was not long scrambling to his feet, but, quick as he was, the sound of Nick's footsteps had already died away.

"The Cactus! the traitor!" he exclaimed. "Alive, an' turned squarely ag'in' me! He wants the secret, too, eh? Huntin' it on his own hook, I s'pose, an' now thet he's got the boy, he's crowin' over the vict'ry he hez jes' won. What ailed my eye when I kivered his head awhile ago? War it ordained thet I should merely graze him? Next time I'll hit center. Take care, Cactus! Captain Carlos is on yer track!"

The leader of the Twelve went down the canyon with his fingers at the triggers of his revolvers. His mad eyes, but keen, saw every bush, every crevice; his ears caught every sound.

He had lost for the present the Boy Gold Hunter and his secret; for the present only. He was not the man to think for a moment that the great secret had slipped through his hands forever.

"Ef I could find Mohave an' fix matters right with him," he muttered. "I war too mad to talk decently to 'im when I saw 'im last. His blood war hot about Dagobert killin' Monte, which war bound to come to pass some day. Mohave nearly shot the secret from my fist, but a miss in such cases is a mile. I could count on Mohave's help ef I could find him. But whar is he?"

Yes, where was the half-breed's Avenger!

We left him lying on the Man with Two Names in the cave in Navajo Canyon. Helen had fired at his unhandsome face and fled; she did not tarry to inquire into the result of her shot, but

the fall of the desperado told her that it had killed. That was enough; Dagobert and his hunter might sleep in death together.

Captain Carlos continued down the gloomy gulch until the mouth of the cavern yearned before him.

"The old rendezvous!" fell from his lips. "Hyar's whar we lived all last summer while huntin' fur the gold mountain. I never expected to come back alone; but alone I am—the last man ov the Twelve."

The opening seemed to invite him; he went in just as the long arrows of another daylight were entering the canyon.

To Carlos, as we have just heard him remark, the cave was not unknown; the names cut in the stone walls told the story of the rendezvous. He soon found himself in the great apartment which still contained an unnatural heat, that did not escape the man's notice.

The warmth of the fire kindled a few hours before by Dagobert still remained, although the cinders were cheerless and dark.

Carlos was surprised to discover the few live coals which his feet unearthed, and for a while he crouched beside them, using his eyes and ears, and with his hand on his revolver.

But as nothing disturbed him, he fanned the coals into a blaze with which he lighted a torch.

"I'll look around a little afore I settle down," he remarked, in a half-audible tone. "I want to know who left this fire."

Starting up with the torch, he took a step toward the stone stairway, but the next instant a noise made him turn to the right.

"Mohave Bill!" he ejaculated.

The figure of a man was braced against the wall a few steps away, the lank, well known figure of Monte's avenger.

Carlos sprung toward him, but stopped suddenly and recoiled with a cry of horror.

Mohave with a horrible expression on his bloodless face was holding out two handless arms!

"Look! Carlos," he hissed. "I found *him*. He took the other hand. If you had followed me I would not be dyin' hyar with Monte un-avenged."

Captain Carlos did not stir. The sight of the robbed arms seemed to have nailed him to the floor of the cavern; his eyes stared at the picture of mountain vengeance before him, and his blood seemed to turn to ice.

"You wanted the mountain ov gold more than you did Dagobert's blood!" continued Mohave. "Which do you want worst *now*?"

"The blood ov Dagobert, ov course!"

A triumphant glitter seemed to relieve the deathly glare of Mohave's eyes.

"Sw'ar it, Carlos."

"I do at the p'int ov my bowie!" was the answer, and as he spoke Carlos whipped out his knife and held its point against his breast.

"Now, whar is he, Mohave?"

"Ef I knew I would hev been on his trail even in the fix I am. Find him! I hed one to avenge; you hev two, cap'n—me an' Monte."

The maimed desperado tottered from the wall as he finished; his strength seemingly harbored for the scene he had just passed through entire-

ly deserted him, and Carlos with a shudder stepped aside in order to avoid the bloody wrist. The next moment his companion lay at his feet a corpse, killed by Dagobert, not Helen.

The leader of the Twelve held the flambeau near the contorted face into which he gazed thoughtfully a moment; then he turned away and sprung toward the natural stair.

"I'm the last ov the three, ez I am ov the Twelve!" he exclaimed. "But the last shall be first, an' the worst wolf in the pack."

He went up the stone steps like a person accustomed to them, and his torch was soon throwing its light around and between the stone pillars, that seemed to support the roof of the room he had reached.

Carlos had apparently entered a temple of some kind, for the pillars seemed carved out of stone by human hands; but a close inspection would have proved to any one that nature and nature alone had planted them there in regular order. He was in one of the wonderful caverns of Arizona, that was all.

His torch flitted hither and thither like a Jack-o'-lantern, but always in his hand. Now he held it near the ground as if searching for Dagobert's trail, and now carried it overhead to reveal the recesses of the cave.

Suddenly he uttered a cry, and a moment later he was examining the floor of the cavern.

The human bloodhound had discovered the trail—a few dark spots on the stones.

"The wolf we caught among the Basaltic Buttes is wounded!" he said, springing up. "Mohave did not quite finish his work. I'll finish it fur 'im. I've tracked many a deer by his blood, an' more'n one man, too."

The trail continued, and Captain Carlos threaded the cave with his vengeful eyes fixed upon it. Now and then his lips parted to let through his fierce mustache a sound like the growl of a tiger.

For a moment the mountain of gold had been forgotten; Carlos saw only the handless body in the cave below, and the blood of the man who had slain his comrades.

The depths of the earth which he was traversing seemed to be a perfect network of caves, for the trail of blood led him from one apartment to another.

"I know whar he's goin'!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I might ez well break straight fur it," and removing his eyes from the crimson mark he increased his gait.

A few minutes later Carlos crept under the half-petrified trunk of a tree, and stood in the rosy light of morning.

A wilderness of rocks and some grass surrounded him, but the trail of blood was lost!

He stood on the top of the banks of Navajo Canyon. Not far away he could have looked down into it by leaning over the cliffs, but Carlos did not think of doing this, for his man-hunting eyes were riveted upon a figure which was moving through a copse a long distance from his post.

This figure was no larger than his hand, but he knew that it was a human being, and his first thought was of the man he was trailing.

"I never lose a man when I track him by his blood!" he said, creeping away. "I'll keep the

oath I took fur Mohave's sake. By George! Dagobert, you'll l'arn pretty soon thet the worst man ov the three ar' on yer track."

Captain Carlos followed the figure which fate or fortune had exhibited to his gaze. When he reached the copse he found the prints of hoofs on the narrow trail.

"Whar did he git a hoss?" he asked himself as he stared at the marks. "He's got the best ov me fur the present; but I'll soon hev the upper hand."

Half an hour later the captain of the Twelve came almost suddenly upon a young girl seated on a magnificent black steed. His surprise was so complete that he sprung back with a mountain oath which fixed the eyes of the girl upon him.

"Ah! Captain Carlos!" she exclaimed. "The man of all men I would meet here, and at this moment. Don't draw your revolvers! The one I hold covers you, as you see! I have taken one life since we parted company, but I was forced to do it. Don't provoke me to shed your blood. You will therefore favor me by taking your hands from your weapons."

Captain Carlos bit his lip and his long arms fell at his sides.

He was at Helen's mercy.

CHAPTER XV.

DAGOBERT'S HATE.

NAVAJO NICK was not over cautious when he told the Boss Cactus in plain words that he would try him before investing him with any confidence. He was of course surprised to find the mountain spy his rescuer instead of Dagobert, and he could not believe that the Cactus was sincere in his expressions of hatred toward his old master.

"While he is being tried I will watch him with a hawk's eye," the young gold hunter said to himself; "and at the first treacherous movement I will put a pistol-bullet through him. He is after my secret—the one he lately thought he had whipped out of me. If he is sincere now, why doesn't he apologize for his brutal blows?"

On the subject of the forest whipping-post the spy had not opened his mouth since the rescue, and his silence served to make Nick more suspicious. He did not broach the subject himself, preferring the Cactus's silence to the falsehoods he might coin for his reply.

He told the spy, however, all about the battle between the Twelve and the Navajoes while they were moving from the place of recognition.

"I pity the boys; but the cap'n—curse him!" said the Cactus. "Ar' you sart'in thet they war the gold-huntin' Injuns?"

"The men said so."

"Did you notice their arms?"

"I saw a band on several—between elbow and shoulder."

"The red boys ov ther Buffler Band!" exclaimed the Cactus.

"I know one thing; some of them were the same fiends who tied me to Mahomet's tail!" Nick said, grating his teeth. "I had the satisfaction of paying them back in a measure. I emptied four saddles when they charged. Car-

los shot too fast for me. His pistols seemed to be flashing continually."

"Thet's the way the cap'n allus shoots," replied the Cactus. "He kin empty more Injun-saddles in five minutes than any man on earth. One night among the Basaltic Buttes—"

Nick seized the spy's arm.

"Were you with them when they tied—Captain Flash to a wild horse?"

He was about to say Dagobert, but he suddenly thought of his comrade's instructions.

"Cap'n Flash?" echoed the Cactus. "Oh, he hez two names, bez he? I don't know about him, but the man the three tied to the hoss war named Dagobert."

"Well, go on," said Nick.

"No, I warn't jes' thar, but the hoss went by me like a streak ov greased lightnin'."

"Why did they treat him in that brutal manner?"

"The story is too long fur this time, an' then I couldn't tell it ez glibly ez the cap'n could ef he war talkative, with three horns ov Pimo syrup ahead. However, when the three got to the kentry ov the Buttes, they found this Dagobert thar, livin' with his Injun wife."

Nick started.

"An Indian wife?" he exclaimed. "He never spoke of her to me."

"I should reckon not," smiled the Cactus. "An' I'll tell you why, nugget, fur I happen to know. Dagobert then war lookin' fur the same thing he wants to find now—the gold mountain. Report located it somewhar among the buttes, an' the Injun wife thought she knew suthin' about the place."

"He was too far north," said Nick, hardly knowing what he was saying, but the sudden flash of triumph in the Cactus's eyes told him that he must bridle his tongue.

"The three pards were prospectin' for the mountain too, an' one day they found Dagobert's Injun wife alone. They tried to make her give the secret away, but she acted jes' ez ef she knew it, but wouldn't tell. They threatened her, held their revolvers at her head, but she war game to the last. She war a full-blooded Navajo, an' ez gritty ez a panther. When they found that she only looked into their revolvers an' laughed, they threw a lasso round her neck an' pulled her up to a log thet projected at one corner ov the shanty. Arter a minute they let her down, but she wouldn't give anything away; then up ag'in she went. When they lowered her a second time, she had got beyond tellin' anything. She war dead!"

"Dead?" echoed Nick. "The brutes!"

Dagobert's Injun wife, Winella, war too dead to grin!" said the Cactus, irreverently. "The three pards left her thar, an' it wa'n't long afore they had a lion on their track. But one day jes' at sundown they took Dagobert by surprise, an' treated him to the free ride you hev heard ov. My opinion hez allus been thet fur their own good they should hev killed 'im. I allus told the cap'n so, an' he'll be ov thet opinion too afore he passes in his chips."

Nick, who had listened with devouring interest to the Cactus's homely narration of a scene in Dagobert's life, did not speak for several moments afterward.

"The strangest thing of all is that Dagobert once had an Indian wife," he said.

"Oh, that's ruther the style in Arizony," was the answer. "I've had hed several myself. I'm neither wife, maid, widder, er bachelor; but a man what hez decently planted the most Injun wives of any man on the globe. Behold in the Boss Cactus one who hez loved not wisely, perhaps, but too often. Dagobert loved Winella. I discovered the cabin among the Basaltic Buttes long afore the three pards ever set eyes on it; an' from a sart'in place above it, I watched it fur three weeks. I know that Dagobert thought the world of thet red-skinned gal, an' when he found her dead, he fell down like a man shot in the eye. The pards war fools fur foolin' with his affairs."

"One of them has paid for his share in the crime," said Nick.

"Monte? Mohave Bill hez paid a bit ov interest—one ov his hands. Dagobert will wipe out the hull debt by an' by. I'd ruther be hunted by the hull Navajo nation than by him. But hev'n't you heard su'thin' while I've been talkin'?"

The boy admitted that the narrative had so engrossed his attention that no suspicious sounds had assailed his ears.

"Wal, I've heard sounds," said the Cactus, drawing a revolver. "I'll trot back a rod an' reconnoiter."

"I'll go with you!" said the boy, but the spy's arm waved him back.

"I'll go alone," he said. "You've got the secret. It must not be lost. I know nothin', tharfore, I'm not ov much account."

As the gaunt figure of the Boss Cactus glided away, his treachery of the night when he released the carrier pigeon rose uppermost in the gold hunter's mind.

"He is going to perform another act of betrayal," he said to himself. "I have said that I would slay him if I found him treacherous. I will catch him in the very act."

Nick acted as he had done once before; he crept after the Cactus with a cocked revolver in his hand, fully resolved to put a bullet into his companion's head if he caught him in any questionable act.

"Dagobert is not here to help me, therefore I must take care of myself," and then he added with a smile; "I guess I'm able to do that."

His keen eyes soon caught sight of the well-known figure of the Arizonian spy. He was crouching against the trunk of a tree as if watching something not far away.

"A confederate is coming to him," muttered Nick. "After all I believe that he pretends to hate Captain Carlos in order to discover my secret the sooner; the rescue might have been understood, for I am confident that Carlos had reached the belief that I would never lead him and his men to the real mountain of gold."

Nick had scarcely finished when the Boss Cactus rose and began to glide backward.

"Injuns!" the boy heard him say. "The red boys ov the Buffler Band ar' on the right trail at last. But they hev the Boss Cactus to walk over afore they tech the youngster."

The boy's heart increased its beatings. He felt like grasping the hand of the man who had

just said, in substance, that he would fight for him to the bitter end.

"I believe I can trust him," he murmured.

The next instant the figure of the Cactus leaped into the middle of the mountain pass, and Nick heard a blow and a groan.

"One ov my numerous brothers-in-law!" ejaculated the spy. "Whar ar' the other members ov the family? Oh, I'm hyar—the Boss Cactus ov Arizony, an' every spine is good fur an Injun heart. Come on! The boy an' his precious secret ar' safe while they're behind me. You can git to 'im while I stand hyar."

Nick admired the bravery of the man before him. He leaped forward and clutched his arm.

"I'm here to fight with you!" he said.

"You? I told you to stay back! This miss is mine."

"But—"

"You're goin' to stay back, too!"

And Nick was lifted from the ground and borne swiftly from the spot.

"Stay hyar!" the spy said, releasing him on the spot where he had spun the tale of the Basaltic Buttes. "I'm goin' to do the fightin', an' then I've got a right to vindercate myself in yer mind."

He rushed back before Nick could speak, and the boy heard the almost continuous reports of two revolvers accompanied by a number of wild Indian yells.

"I can't stay here!" he said. "A man who fights for me must not fight alone."

"Stay hyar! Let 'im fight his own battles!" said a voice at his elbow.

Nick wheeled with an exclamation of amazement.

"Dagobert!" he exclaimed.

"I thought I told you to call me Cap'n Flash. Yer memory seems to be failin' you, boy," was the strange reply. "Who's yer pard?"

"The Boss Cactus."

Dagobert took a menacing step toward the spy.

"No! he rescued me from Captain Carlos," cried Nick, seizing his arm. "I would not have met you here if he had not saved me."

Dagobert halted.

"I'll give 'im credit fur thet on the note I hold ag'in' 'im an' the rest!" he said.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FATAL ARROW.

DURING this conversation, the frequent flashing of the Boss Cactus's revolvers told that he was holding his own against the Brethren of the Buffalo Band. Shielded by a huge rock, he brought down an Indian whenever he fired, and the iron-tipped arrows and leaden balls sent at him in return, smote the barricade or passed harmless over the head of the intrepid desperado. Several of the first-named missiles fell at the feet of Dagobert and the young gold hunter.

"We'll let the Cactus fight his own battles. He seems to be doin' well. We're pards once more, Navajo; now fur the yellow Jacks!"

Navajo Nick looked up into Dagobert's face and hesitated. He was really going to leave the Cactus to contend alone with the red gold league.

"He is doin' us a favor by keepin' the Injuns at bay," continued the Man with Two Names. "In my opinion, he ar' actually makin' us sure of the gold mountain. Ef we meet 'im ag'in, we'll thank 'im; ef we find his bones, we'll raise a tombstun to his virtues. Come! the bonanza! Now or never!"

Dagobert's hand encircled the young gold-seeker's wrist, and before he could make up his mind to desert the Cactus, he found himself dragged from the spot.

"I've hed a time ov it since I saw you last," said Dagobert, and his eyes flashed with wolfish triumph, as he continued: "Thar's only one left out ov the three pards ov the Basaltic Buttes."

"Only one?" echoed Nick. "Where is Mohave Bill?"

"Whar? I'll show you thet mountain game-cock presently," was the reply. "He couldn't help himself to the choicest b'ar-steak in Arizona ef it war lyin' before him. We've hed our last tussle, knife to knife, heart to heart! The fate ov Monte turned him into a tiger; he got in a blow jes' under my left shoulder, next door to my life chest, an' I went down seein' nothin', wiped out, ez I thought. But the gal who saw the tussle must hev given me a lift in the nick ov time, fur I opened my eyes to find Mohave lyin' on me, breathin' like a dyin' ba'r. I felt faint, kind o' dizzy like fur a while, but the sight ov him fetched me around solid. What did I do? Look thar!"

Dagobert had thrust his hand into his bosom, and Nick was starting from the ghastly object which had been taken therefrom.

It was a human hand, cold, and of course lifeless!

"It war the only one he had left, but I took it!" said Dagobert in a heartless tone. "Thet hand did suthin' once that made me its eternal foe. Monte's I nailed to the mountain shanty whar the twelve used to congregate; but this hand—the last one that Mohave Bill owned, I'm going to throw into the face ov the last of the three who war thar!"

"And so would I!" exclaimed Nick, recalling the story that the Cactus had told. "But, where will we find Captain Carlos?"

"I don't know exactly whar, but we'll find him!" declared Dagobert, in an assuring tone. "I don't hear the Cactus's revolvers any longer. I guess the tussle is over."

It was true. They had not traversed very far, but the reports of firearms were no longer heard. Nick wanted to go back and ascertain the fate of the desperado who had betrayed and then befriended him, but he did not make known his wishes to Dagobert.

"You hev'n't seen the gal lately?" questioned the Avenger, suddenly.

"I have not. The Cactus saw her just before our fight with the Indians. She was going to try to rescue me from the Twelve."

"A boss gal!" averred Dagobert. "She's worth her weight in gold. Nick, when we find the mountain ov gold, Helen must hev a share."

Did the boy blush? His eyes fell beneath Dagobert's gaze.

"She'd make a real bonanza queen," he continued. "Nobody is left to care fur her now,

unless—unless you kind o' look after her interest. I mean bizness, boy."

Nick did not answer for a moment.

"We'll give her a share in the 'find,'" he answered, at length.

"Ov course! but she'll be wantin' a share ov suthin' else," answered the man from Mohave, smiling at the young gold hunter's confusion. "Therel don't look sheepish, Nick. When we've got the mountain all to ourselves, you kin turn yer attention to Cupid's gold mine."

The boy started and looked up. His look seemed to say: "You are not the rough man you seem to be, Dagobert."

For the first time during their acquaintance the Avenger avoided the boy's gaze; but all at once he turned to him and spoke in a tone which he had not used before.

"You're bound to find me out," he said. "There was a time when I was not Dagobert, the Avenger, nor Captain Flash, the king of Mohave City. Whenever I speak of love, I am carried back to *that* time. It was the golden year of my life, even though my secondary occupation was gold-seeking. But, wait until I have settled with this last man! Then I will tell you all."

"No use. I know all."

"You! Who told you?"

"The Cactus."

For a moment Dagobert seemed a marble statue in the starlight as he stood speechless before the boy.

At last he said, slowly:

"Well, haven't I a right to the hands that struck that day at the cabin in the Basaltic Buttes?"

"I wouldn't keep one of them from you if I could, Dagobert," was the reply.

The Man with Two Names stood a moment longer in the position he had assumed, and then bounded away with a mad oath on his tongue.

Nick followed until his passion had cooled, when he seemed to be himself again.

"We are almost back to our old rendezvous in Navajo Canyon," he said to his boy pard. "Mohave Bill is keeping house down thar in a kind o' way. Now we reach a stage of our gold game where we ought to show each other our hands. I am convinced of one thing; the mountain isn't among the Buttes. Tell me what you know."

It was now early daylight, and the two had halted at the foot of a mountain.

The gold boy drew from beneath the folds of his jacket a piece of colored paper. Dagobert's eyes glistened when they saw it.

"This is the map of the precious region. I got it from Alapatha, but not until he felt that he was dying. The map may be his own work, and it may not. You have been all over this region, Dagobert. What can you make out?"

Nick placed in his comrade's hands the strange document which his eyes were already devouring. Dagobert held it up as he turned his back to the glowing eastern skies, and studied it intently. At last he held in his hand a golden secret for which he had planned and hunted year in and year out.

"It's Injun work," rippled over his lips. "I've seen these kind o' maps before. Hyar's Navajo Canyon our first p'int as you always said, an' the four crossed arrows must mean the mountain of gold."

"I think so," said Nick.

"I know it! I see all now. The old chief's map is as plain as day to me."

The gold boy could not repress a cry of triumph.

"At last!" he shouted as Dagobert held the map down for inspection. "Explain to me, Dagobert. Tell me how you discovered the mystery's solution."

"The eyes of the Man with Two Names sparkled like diamonds. His bronzed finger swooped upon the map."

"You see, boy— Jehosaphat!"

Well might Dagobert cut short his explanation, and utter the startling cry that had just fallen from his lips.

Nick sprung back with his companion and the two whirled to the East. As for the map, it was no longer held by Dagobert's fingers. It lay on the ground ten feet away, perforated by an Indian arrow three feet in length!

The shaft which had been intended for Dagobert's neck had passed over his shoulder, and pierced the plan of the region of gold.

Overhead stood the author of the almost deadly shot. He held in his hand the heavy elk-horn bow of the Navajo brave, and his eyes were staring at the man who had so miraculously escaped.

"One of our enemies!" said Dagobert as his pistol arm went up. "The band on his arm tells the tale."

"Shall we never escape them?"

"Not until we have wiped out the last one."

The Navajo saw the revolver of the white man and hastened to fit an arrow to the string; but before either foe could fire the crack of a firearm awoke the echoes of the morning, and the red-man pitched forward to fall at the gold hunter's feet.

Dagobert and Nick recoiled astonished, but the former did not lower his revolver.

"Wait!" he said. "We've got the advantage now. If the person who dropped the red-skin is a foe, I'll bring him down hyar before he takes in the situation."

Almost before Dagobert ceased speaking a figure appeared on the very spot just vacated by the Indian.

"May I have wings!" he exclaimed, bringing the ready weapon to his side again. "Look! Nick. I wouldn't shoot at that target for all the gold in Arizona!"

The eyes of the Boy Gold Hunter were filled with delight. The figure on the jutting rock overhead possessed a familiar contour; he threw up his cap and shouted to attract its possessor's attention.

An answering cry came downward, and the slayer of the Indian disappeared. Nick's heart beat fast while he waited, and as a girl suddenly appeared emerging from a copse a short distance, away he went forward with a cry of happy greeting.

It was Helen, the waif of the train.

She glanced at her victim as she advanced to greet the silent Dagobert.

"You didn't think that the Injun had fired at me, eh?" half-queried the Avenger.

"No! I thought he was watching the man I had just met."

"And he was—"

"Captain Carlos!"

Nick shot a glance at Dagobert. His eyes were the eyes of the man-tiger; his face dark and full of hate.

"Where is he, Helen?"

"Alas! I do not know now, but not far away, I suspect. I accidentally met him, and having tried to find out something about the whereabouts of you two, I dismissed him. I held him at my revolver's mercy, and although he deserves death for more crimes than one, I spared him for the man who has the best right to slay him."

"Good!" fell from Dagobert's lips. "I am that man! Now, let us go back to the map. The gold hill first; then the last of the three pards."

The trio turned to the spot where Dagobert and Nick had last seen the Indian map; but it was not there!

For a second their eyes seemed about to leap from their heads! The arrow lay on the ground; but the plan—the precious diagram—had disappeared!

"A wind took it off; but we'll find it!" said the Man with Two Names.

The hunt for the missing map was extended over the little valley in which the trio happened to be.

All at once Dagobert stopped and pointed at the ground.

Nick and Helen ran up.

There was before the Avenger a human foot-track.

"The map has passed beyond our hands!" announced the giant. "It now belongs to the last of the three pards."

"Not to Captain Carlos?" gasped our hero.

"To that same. But I think I kin find the mountain without it. I've got the map kind o' photographed on my brain."

"Fortune grant that you have!" murmured Nick.

CHAPTER XVII.

VENGEANCE AND SUCCESS.

DESPITE Dagobert's assertion that he had the lost diagram of the gold mountain "kind o' photographed" on his mind, there was another man who seemed to be on a surer trail. This was the person who held the map itself.

Near the close of a long summer day, one week after the events last recorded, the finder of the "Injun map" came out of a cave at the base of a rugged mountain a few miles north of Navajo Canyon.

He looked the desperado that he really was. A pair of avaricious eyes glittered like a basilisk's above his wild uncombed beard. They had the triumphant look that leaps from the tiger's eyes when he stands over the game finally run to earth.

The man was Captain Carlos. The possessor of a cunning mind, the strange marks on the

map had been deciphered, and we need not disguise the fact that he stood at the close of that particular day at the door of the gold-mines. He had explored as much of the interior of the famous mountain as man could explore, and his practiced eyes had dilated over the Golconda of wealth which the old Indian's secret had at last yielded to him.

He felt as the sole possessor of such a secret would naturally feel. He was the last of the Twelve, if we except the Cactus, who was but a spy, and at no time a regular member of the band; he was, too, the only survivor of the Three Pardes of the Basaltic Buttes, against whom the vengeance of a human tiger had been directed.

He stood for a moment at the mouth of the cavern, his familiar figure more than half concealed by the bushes that grew about him; then he turned and disappeared.

At that moment a figure rose above some mountain grass not far away, and two keen eyes regarded the opening.

"A cave, sure enough!" parted the lips of the watcher. "What of the captain hez struck the boss bonanza? Shatter my photygraft! ef I didn't always imagine it was somewhar in these parts. Cactus, you'l jes' take in the situation. But be cautious, old boy! The cap'n's death with the trigger."

The speaker crept toward the cave like a snake. When he reached it, he put a bowie between his teeth, drew two revolvers, and went in.

Darkness enveloped him, but the Boss Cactus guided himself through it by shoulder, which touched an unseen wall.

"I don't care so much fur the rocks myself. I want the boy to hev a show. He didn't trust me even when I war holdin', my own ag'in the last ov the buffler boys, an' he guv me the slip. But, when I kin hunt 'im up an' tell 'im thet I've diskivered the mountain ov gold, why he'll take me fur a pard. He'll hev to!"

The Cactus executed a sudden halt, for the flash of a lucifer had pierced the darkness. The light grew larger, and creeping forward he saw Captain Carlos inspecting some stones which he had taken from the wall.

The spy stood up and leaned forward with a cocked revolver in his bronzed right hand. The light of the torch revealed the stalwart figure of the captain of the Arizonians, who saw nothing but the precious quartz lying on his broad hand.

"He tumbled me from my boss—tried to shoot me through the brain!" grated the Cactus as he looked with eyes blazing with eternal hatred. "An' all because I war goin' to help the gal—the boy's pard. My time is hyar! Every dog hez his day, cap'n, an' the day ov the mastiff ov Arizony hez come!"

The arm of the Boss Cactus was lifted and straightened, the revolver hidden by the shadows of the rocks beyond the torch's light covered the heart of Captain Carlos; but no report rung through the cave of gold.

Something like a specter rose from the ground at the spy's feet, and a hand, certainly one of flesh, fell on his outstretched arm.

"He belongs to me, pard—to Dagobert!" fell

from the intruder's lips. "The mills ov vengeance grind slow, but the grist always gets ground."

The Cactus lowered his weapon.

"Ov course he b'longs to you!" he said. "Do what you please."

Dagobert glided forward until he reached the edge of the light. There he stopped and glared for a moment at the man he had hunted.

"Captain Carlos?" he called out.

The gold hunter turned. As he faced his foe something traversed the space between them, struck him in the face and fell to the ground.

"In the first place, look at my challenge!" commanded Dagobert.

Carlos lowered his torch and saw a dead hand—the hand of Mohave Bill.

He raised his head with a half-growl, half-oath, which delighted the man who seemed to await his pleasure.

"You know that hand, Carlos?"

"Ov course I do; an' I know who took it. I want his heart."

"It is here!"

The eager Avenger cleared the intervening distance with a tremendous bound, and an exclamation of horror fell from the sole spectator's lips as the men closed.

"This for the tragedy at the cabin in the Basaltic Buttes!" accompanied the first blow that Dagobert struck with his bowie at the breast of his foe.

"And this fur the hands of my hunted pards!" was the answer.

For one awful minute the two giants battled in the gold cave, watched by the gaunt spy who with naked bowie, was ready to leap forward if the scales of battle should favor his late leader.

Suddenly the combatants separated.

Dagobert the Avenger stood alone, and at his feet, his unhandsome features revealed by his last torch, lay the stalwart form of the last survivor of the gold league of northern Arizona.

The Boss Cactus was about to join the victor when he stooped over his foe. The spy kept his position, and from it saw the captain's right hand amputated by several quick strokes of the bowie.

Drawing back for a moment Dagobert gazed triumphantly at the hideous trophy, and then dashed it into its owner's face!

"I've kept my oath," he said. "I have taken from the three murderers the right hand that slew their victim. Winella, you have been avenged!"

"An' hyar's a witness who will go afore any squire in the West, an' sw'ar that it war well done."

Dagobert picked up the torch and scrutinized the Cactus by its light. The scorching look was well borne.

"You were *there* that day?" he said, almost savagely.

"Not exactly thar, but I know all about the circumstance," answered the Cactus. "I couldn't hev saved her ef I hed tried."

"I believe you, Cactus," he said.

The spy of the Mountain Twelve held out his hand. Dagobert took it, but he relinquished it abruptly.

"I want to solve one doubt," he said.

Stooping over his last foe, he plunged his hand into a pocket and produced a piece of colored paper.

"I knew it!" he said, holding it up before the Cactus. "He found the map, just how or where we may never know; but here it is, proof that he got his fingers on it. I didn't have the map photographed on my mind as well as I thought. We've been huntin' for this place ever since we lost it; but we're here at last; at last!"

"This is the mountain of gold, then?" queried the Cactus.

"I haven't inspected it, but we've found it, Cactus. I'll bet my life on that!"

The two men thus brought face to face, examined the interior of the mountain together. Every now and then ejaculations of amazement escaped their lips; they looked like men who had been suddenly transported into a mine of pure gold, and Dagobert in an outburst of excitement, would strike the Cactus on the back, exclaiming:

"The old Injun knew gold when he saw it, didn't he, pard? Just think of the gold king and queen this 'find' makes. What'll you take for your share?"

"I've giv' it to the boy!" was the spy's reply. "I'm goin' to force 'im to believe that I kin be trusted in some matters."

The next day a little company of four persons went through the gold mine. That it was a mine long since abandoned by a race of people who had passed away, Dagobert readily believed. They saw evidences of such a thing all around them.

"We may have to fight for the prize yet," decided the Man with Two Names. "The survivors of the Twelve and the Brethren of the Buffalo Band will contest the 'find' with us."

The little party felt that the battle for the gold mountain had begun; but as days wore away without bringing any contestants for it into the country, their convictions gradually fled.

Where the Navajoes had attacked the mountain men lay the bodies of nine stalwart gold hunters. The league was powerless to wrest a prize from a child; as an organization it had passed from life, and from history.

Where the Cactus proved himself true to Navajo Nick, ten savages lay dead on their weapons. On the right arm of each was the distinguishing sign of their league for gold.

Had the spy exterminated the band? All, perhaps, save the one shot from the rock by the waif of the train, and the spy killed in the canyon cave.

A few weeks since the leading paper of Tucson contained the following paragraph which commanded widespread attention:

"Colonel Nick Emerson, known in the great Southwest as 'Gold Nick,' has returned from a visit to the famous 'Helen' Mine in the northern part of the Territory. He reports everything lovely in that region, the Indians quiet, and a vast quantity of ore on its way East. Our readers are familiar with the young Colonel's adventures while hunting the mine; they will recall the deeds of the young lady who

was strangely thrown into his company during those stirring days, therefore, they will not be surprised to learn that 'Gold Nick' is on his way to San Francisco, where the lady is, there to be one of the high contracting parties in a notable wedding soon to occur. We congratulate the colonel in advance."

We are at a loss to determine the nature of the service that brought Navajo Nick a military title, but on his first visit to the chief city of Arizona after the character of his "find" had become known, he was greeted as "Colonel" by the many who sought his acquaintance.

The Boss Cactus of Arizona still insists that he is "one of the lost arts," and is one of the prominent features connected with the "Helen Mine."

Dagobert—Dagobert, the man who hunted gold and human hands at the same time—remains at the scene of his last triumph, helping to enrich, more than himself, the handsome youth who won from the old Navajo chief the secret of gold.

Let us take leave of them here with Winella avenged, the secret known to the world, and with the red and white gold leagues of the Southwest baffled—dead!—literally exterminated.

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